Demystifying Cultural Contents in EFL Textbooks: A Comparative Analysis of Inner and Expanding Circle Countries Series

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ABSTRACT

The third millennium brought with itself the concept of cultural mosaic. Textbooks play crucial roles in representing this diversity in teaching various cultures to present regions, people, behaviors, conventions, religions, and values of different societies around the globe. In recent decades, cultural content analysis of EFL textbooks has become an important issue in ELT education to account for globalization and intercultural communication, especially in inner- and expanding-circle countries. This study aimed to probe into the extent English language textbooks demonstrate cultural themes by comparing the written texts of two textbook series, Vision (books 1, 2, 3) and Touchstone (books 2, 3, 4), taught in high school and language institutes for adult students from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels. Having adopted Xiao's (2010) checklist, this cultural theme analysis extracted and compared the big 'C' and small 'c' cultural themes in these six textbooks using the Chi-Square statistical analysis. The findings showed an imbalanced occurrence of themes in both textbooks with slightly more occurrences of Big 'c' cultural themes than small "c" in both textbooks. Touchstone has more frequent Big "C" and Small "c" themes than the Vision series. The most frequent Big C culture topics were geography, social norms, and education and the most prominent small 'c' culture topics included lifestyle, everyday living relations, and values/beliefs respectively This study enlightens the organization of cultural contents presented in common English coursebooks to help expedite the process of learning culture as a constituent of intercultural communicative competence and to equip students of English as a foreign language, as intercultural citizens, for the international communication ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION

Modern technology has enabled us to interact and communicate with people anywhere in the world for personal and business purposes. As a result of living in this "global village" and our increasingly multicultural society, we find ourselves interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, encompassing various ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, and languages. However, these interactions can present difficulties, particularly for those who communicate

in different languages and adhere to distinct cultural communication norms. Weninger and Kiss (2013) argued that language education should aim for transformation, which can only be attained through critical reflection on cultural and pedagogical issues. With this in mind, the critical role of ELT textbooks is underscored as a fundamental type of resource in English Language Teaching, entrusted with the responsibility to support and facilitate the educational experience to "promote the development of a reflexive, open, and globally aware language learner" (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 696).

Textbooks as an important component of any curriculum are imperative teaching aids in language education and the main sources of the teaching/learning process in educational settings. Critical scholars and educators are greatly interested in the portrayal of culture in textbooks (Canale, 2016). Language learning textbooks can provide a variety of different perspectives on the world and help learners improve their communication abilities and understanding of language (Risager, 2021). Many researchers have highlighted that the evaluation of the textbook is markedly valuable for teachers, supervisors, administrators, and materials developers, to name a few. For Allwright (1981), textbooks are regarded as primary educational resources and vital instruments that enhance language acquisition and cultural knowledge. In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), these textbooks, according to Sheldon (1988), are perceived as fundamental components in any language program. Textbooks can communicate cultural and intercultural knowledge using images, written words, audio and video content, conversations, vocabulary, and various other methods (Adaskou et al., 1990, Derakhshan, 2024). They are rich resources for cultural knowledge and information and the main teaching tools in many language teaching programs. Textbooks, according to Calafato & Gudim (2022), "serve as a good indicator of what literary content teachers are using with their learners" (p. 827), as noted by Duncan and Paran (2017), are the source of authenticity in language and knowledge of cultural contents.

Some scholars in language education have emphasized the connection between language and culture (Byram, 2013; Halliday, 2007; Kramsch, 1993). An essential element of modern foreign language pedagogy is the interconnectedness of language learning and cultural immersion, particularly evident in affluent educational settings (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). The importance of this interdependence is demonstrated by claiming that culture is "the fifth dimension of language teaching" (Damen, 1987). Guessabi (2020) asserts that teaching language entails teaching culture as well as language. Therefore, learning a language is associated with understanding society's cultural norms. Several studies have recently probed into the cultural content in EFL textbooks worldwide (e.g., Banaruee et al., 2023; Jang et al., 2024; Keles & Yazan, 2023; Lavrenteva & Orland-Balak, 2023; Qi & Derakhshan, 2024; Sadeghzadegan et al., 2024). In EFL settings such as Iran, ELT materials play a crucial role as learners lack exposure to native L2 speakers and struggle to grasp the cultural concepts and social norms of the target language. EFL researchers in various learning contexts have given due consideration to evaluating textbooks for cultural features (Alemi & Jafari, 2012; Hinkel, 1999; Liu & Laohawiriyanon, 2013). Yet, few in Iran have ever investigated the comparative cultural content analysis of the Vision series, the high school textbook as a book authored in Iran as an expanding circle country, and the Touchstone series as an adult textbook developed in the UK as an inner circle country. The researchers have failed to find any study comparing and contrasting a few recent English textbooks being used in Iran regarding their cultural theme presentation. The present study aimed to find out whether the available English textbooks provide sufficient cultural awareness for teachers and students to have successful intercultural communication. Furthermore, this study seeks to investigate the frequency and variety of cultural theme presentations and how they empower learners and teachers to build intercultural communicative competence and Intercultural communication. Besides, it aims to explore how cultural topics are dispersed in two different sets of textbooks commonly utilized in high schools and language institutes in Iran.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the last few decades, one of the most basic changes in language learning and teaching has been the recognition of the cultural dimension as a key component in language pedagogy. The language echoes cultural values, norms, and other societal features. It is regarded as an inseparable part of such characteristics. Culture signifies language and is transferred by language from one generation to another (Emmitt, & Pollock 1997, as cited in Leveridge, 2008). Brown (2000) states that language and culture are so integrated that one may not be dissociated from the other by diminishing the significance of any one of them. The association between culture and language plays a major role in language learning, which is presented by theorists such as Valdes (1986), Byram (1989), Byram and Morgan (1994), Seelye (1993), who underlined the value of teaching culture to achieve language proficiency. Additionally, various scholars have maintained the integration of culture and language in foreign language education. (e.g., Byram, 1997, 1998,

2001, 2008; Corbett, 2003; Kramsch, 1993, 1998; Risager, 2007; Sercu et al., 2004, 2005). They believe that language and culture cannot be dissociated but are interrelated in foreign language instruction, (Brown, 2000; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006, Ho, 2009; Kramsch, 1993; Shen, 2004; Xia, 2013).

Every specific community has its own unique cultural store, shaped and shared by its members, which sets it apart from other communities. Unless they actively engage in cultural studies through educational materials and textbooks, people from different countries have little knowledge of the cultures of other nations. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) believe textbooks are universal teaching elements. Textbooks are an important resource for instruction in a course of study (Cunningsworth, 1995). According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), textbooks serve as an ideology, an authority, a trainer, a map, a resource, a teacher, and a restrictor. According to Brumfit (1996, cited in Aliakbari, 2004), learners would not favor a model based on a specific locality because it was too restrictive, but they

would prefer a neutral educated variety as it provided the greatest access to English globally. Kachru (1985) posits that textbooks are fundamental resources for language acquisition among students in both the expanding and outer circles. Under Kachru's classification, English language users can be categorized into three distinct categories: (1) Inner circle nations, such as the United Kingdom, in which English is commonly used as a traditional means of communication both linguistically and culturally, (2) Outer circle nations, like India, where English is predominantly utilized for official or educational purposes, and (3) Expanding circle nations, such as Iran, where English is utilized for academic goals. As a whole, textbooks published in inner, outer, or expanding circle countries are examples of language and culture that reflect various cultural perspectives, identities, beliefs, and perspectives (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Through a theme and content analysis of the textbook, the culture portrayed in a textbook can be uncovered.

Effective intercultural communication is important in comprehending the world's cultural diversity and has made it a priority in the modern era (Ilie, 2019). Knowing foreign languages offers students the chance to develop valuable competencies crucial for personal growth and career decision-making in today's interconnected world. (Kanclerienė, 2024). To effectively communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, one must develop cultural competence (Sue et al., 2009). Textbooks including cultural themes offer learners real-life communication, allowing them to practice navigating cultural nuances and enhancing their ability to communicate appropriately in diverse settings (Faiza & Sakina, 2022). The cultural aspect in SL/FL textbooks does not just provide information about the nation and its citizens but also familiarizes learners with customs regarding communication, tourism, education, and work.

Understanding the significance of cultural themes in language learning is crucial in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, where the concepts of "Big C" and "Small c" culture are essential. "Big C" culture pertains to the official, structured elements like literature, art, history, and institutions, that are usually highlighted in conventional education (Rodríguez, 2018). On the other hand, Small c culture encompasses the informal, day-to-day aspects of life, such as communication styles, daily routines, and social norms that impact individuals' experiences within a culture. Studies indicate that incorporating both Big C culture (formal, institutional culture) and Small c culture (everyday culture) into vocabulary instruction enhances cultural sensitivity and communication skills. Therefore, in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the relationship between textbooks and the incorporation of Big "C" and small "c" cultures is an essential topic. This allowed students to engage in successful cross-cultural communication. Several academic research studies have examined how cultural content is represented in the English as a Foreign Language textbook series and how it affects intercultural communication among language learners. By examining the themes and material of the textbook, the culture portrayed can be uncovered. The study highlights a strong connection between EFL educational materials and the representation of Big "C" and small"c" cultures.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Several academics from various cultural backgrounds have examined textbooks with regard to cultural themes and contents in light of the growing interest in culture in foreign language instruction and the growth of cultural and intercultural approaches. Kilickaya's (2004) checklist was utilized by Olajide (2010) to evaluate Nigerian primary schools' English textbooks in terms of cultural content. Wu (2010) next examined, using Byram's criteria, the cultural content of four textbooks used in Chinese colleges. Comparably, Xian studied the cultural contents of a Chinese university EFL listening textbook, concentrating on Big C and Small C cultures. She specifically investigated whether the textbook's portrayal of Small C culture could help students develop their intercultural communicative competence by conducting a descriptive content analysis. Identifying Big C and Small c cultural aspects: Chen (2004) and Lee

(2009) proposed themes. In the target speech community, big C stands for a range of data concerning issues like education, geography, art, customs, history, and festivals; small c stands for norms, ideologies, and elements like age, gender, and socioeconomic status (Lee, 2009). As per Chen's (2004) analysis, cultural values like greetings, holidays, weather, lifestyle, body language, customs, food, and daily routine are included in Small c culture, whereas Big C culture encompasses themes like education, politics, music, history, geography, economy, and social system. The great historical figures, formal culture, the formal institutions (social, political, and economic), and the products of literature, fine arts, and the sciences that fall under the category of elite culture are all considered to be the "Big C" in his definition of civilization. Additionally, the little "c" stands for the way of life of a specific group of people, which refers to the aspects of daily life that sociologists and anthropologists study, such as housing, food, clothing, tools, transportation, and all the behavioral patterns that experts in cultural issues consider appropriate and necessary. The distribution of cultural themes based on the big "C" and small "c" types of culture was presented in a different study by Xiao (2010), who also created 16 themes to conduct the examination. Xiao (2010) proposes some detailed themes to introduce the big C and small c. He proposes nine themes for big "C" and seven aspects for small "c" as follows:

1. Big "C" cultures include (9 themes): geography, politics, education, history, social norms, economy, music, literature/art, and architecture.

2. Small "c" cultures include (7 themes): customs, food, hobbies, holidays, gestures/ body language, lifestyle, and values.

According to Alhaj and Alwadai (2023), incorporating cultural content into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks is crucial for promoting intercultural communication in the modern globalized world. Studies have shown that while textbooks provide opportunities for cultural learning, their representation of cultural themes can be unbalanced, often focusing predominantly on target cultures and surface-level cultural aspects, which may hinder the development of a deeper intercultural understanding (Mekheimer & Amin, 2019). Putri, et al. (2023) scrutinized Indonesian EFL textbooks and noted the prominence of small c cultural topics such as communication norms, manners, and food. Lasekan, et al. (2023) globally focused on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, emphasizing the predominance of cultural material from Western nations like the United States and the United Kingdom. The study underscored the need to incorporate Big C and small c elements in textbooks for a more well-rounded and culturally inclusive representation of societies. In Iran, with the Ministry of Education's approval, the majority of English teaching resources can be categorized as either international textbooks authored by English native speakers or local materials developed by Iranian English educators. Studies on the cultural content of EFL textbooks, as claimed by Sharif and Yarmohammadi (2013), have not been extensively studied (e.g., Rashidi & Najafi, 2010, Ziaei, 2012) or examined cultural representation in a number of textbook series used at Iranian language schools (Alikbari, 2004, Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011). Majdzadeh (2002) conducted a content analysis of textbooks used in grades eight and nine of public schools as well as textbooks used at a language institute in Iran. The ideological content of the textbooks published in the US and UK was investigated by Baleghizadeh and Jamali Motahed (2010). In order to create a model of cultural patterns that includes norms, institutions, values, and artifacts, Zarei and Khalessi (2011) set out to assess the cultural contents of the Interchange series. In four textbooks—*Top Notch*, *Headway*, *On Your Mark,* and *Interchange*—Rajabi and Ketabi (2012) looked at four dimensions of culture which were taken from Adaskou et al. (1990). A comparison was carried out by Ghaffarzadeh, et al (2014), Rezaee, et al. (2012), Shahini, et al., (2017), and Tajeddin & Teimournezhad (2015) on the portrayal of culture in local and international textbooks. Additionally, EFL textbooks in the Iranian context were examined by Hossienzadeh et al. (2022), Rostami and Zakidizaji (2021), and Sadeghi and Sepahi (2018).

Furthermore, a few scholars have examined how Iranian teachers and students evaluate EFL textbooks from their point of view, considering what cultural content they would like to see included in the texts (Ashrafi & Ajideh, 2018; Birjandi & Alizadeh, 2012; Dehbozorgi et al., 2014; Riasati & Zare, 2010). For instance, Iranian EFL teachers thought that the Interchange series was suitable and efficient in terms of culture for Iranian EFL students. Riasati and Zare (2010) examined how teachers view the pedagogical worth and appropriateness of the Interchange series. Ashraf et al. (2013) examined how English textbooks relate to the cultural tastes of Iranian EFL learners in a similar setting. As a whole, Iranians, especially students, have gradually changed their views and attitudes toward the need to maintain intercultural and cross-cultural communication with the world, as well as toward the English language, as a result of advancements in information technology and telecommunications as well as the emergence of English as the language of global trade, commerce, and science (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008). Therefore, selecting effective textbooks is the main

source of input for many L2 learners in most expanding-circle countries like Iran to have intercultural and cultural communication. For this reason, this paper delved into the cultural patterns represented in the two textbooks *Vision* and *Touchstone* which are being taught to students in high schools and private language institutes respectively. The goal is to examine how various cultures are represented in these textbooks and to determine if cultural prejudices exist in these widely used ELT resources. With this in consideration, the research aims to investigate how Big C and Small c cultures are depicted in these two main textbooks currently utilized in the EFL educational setting in Iran.

Having had an exhaustive review of the literature and the gap found, the researchers tried to conduct the current study to address the following questions concerning the mentioned EFL textbooks:

- How are cultural themes represented in the Vision and Touchstone textbooks based on Xiao's (2010) checklist?
- Is there any significant difference between the Vision and Touchstone series in terms of cultural themes?
- What is the most prominent cultural theme(s) portrayed in Vision and Touchstone textbooks?

METHODOLOGY

CORPUS

The corpus in this study comprised two local and global textbooks, namely Vision and Touchstone. Both are developed for English as a foreign language learners specifically younger adults and are currently utilized in Iran's public secondary school system and major language institutes respectively. These two textbook series were selected since Vision, according to Kachru (1986), represented an expanding circle country textbook and Touchstone was developed and published in the UK, an inner circle country. Besides, few studies have compared these two in Iran.

Vision: English for Schools (3rd ed. 2018) series is a three-level locally published English textbook developed for grades 10th to 12th for Iranian high school students. Vision series consists of three books namely Vision 1, 2, and 3 which have a total of ten lessons: Vision 1 (four lessons), Vision 2 (three lessons), and Vision 3 (three lessons). The books have a similar lesson structure with 10 similar sections: Get Ready, New Words and Expressions, Conversation, Vocabulary Development, Reading, Pronunciation, Writing, Listening and Speaking, Grammar, and What You Learned. Vision 3 does not have a Pronunciation section.

Touchstone (2nd ed., 2014) series is a four-level American English course internationally developed by Cambridge for learners from beginner to upper-intermediate levels (A1 – B1) which is now locally taught in private language institutes. Books in all levels consist of 12 units addressing the skills of reading, listening, writing, speaking, and subskills of grammar and vocabulary. To make an equitable comparison between the cultural themes of both textbooks, the researchers did not include the Touchstone Elementary book in the corpus since the Vision books are developed for intermediate-level English proficiency. The analysis covered all the written texts of the student books, including texts, exercises, and activities of all six student books.

DESIGN

This study investigates the disclosure of the cultural themes presented in these textbook series from expanding and inner circle countries. As Weber (1990) puts it when cultural issues are investigated, content analysis is an appropriate research method with various procedures to draw valid conclusions from texts corpus. Content analysis has some benefits. First, it is used for texts or transcripts, i.e. products of human communication that form the core of social interaction, and data is analyzed without the obtrusive role of the participants themselves. Second, content analysis can be qualitative and quantitative, and high-quality studies combine both to ensure research trustworthiness in terms of validity and reliability. Therefore, there might be no risk that they behave according to certain expectations, which, consequently, can change the nature of the data (Cohen et al., 2007; Stemler, 2001; Weber, 1990). In the content analysis of these textbooks, the text is analyzed, interpreted, and verified systematically to identify cultural problems (DeWitt. et al, 2013; Weber, 1990).

DATA COLLECTION

To collect data for this descriptive content analysis study, the researchers started by selecting the textbooks widely used in the Iranian EFL context of state-run schools and language institutes when conducting data collection. The justification behind selecting them was already discussed in the previous section. Then, informed by the literature, this study used the modified version of the checklist of Chen (2004) and Lees (2009) presented by Xiao (2010) to identify the cultural themes in these two textbooks. It provides a framework for identifying and analyzing cultural themes in intercultural communication. Xiao (2010) introduced the cultural concepts of Big C and Small c and developed 16 themes to utilize in his investigation. The same classifications were used in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1
Xiao (2010) Cultural Themes Checklists

Big C culture themes (9 themes)	Small c culture themes (7 themes)
G/P, Governments/ Politics	F, Food
Ec, Economy	Ho, Holiday
Hi, History	L/S, Living style
G, Geography	C, Customs
L/A, Literature/Art	B/V, Belief/Value
S, Society's norms	Hob, Hobbies
Ed, Education	G/B, Gesture/body language
A, Architecture	
M, Music	

With this framework in mind, one of the researchers first skimmed through the lessons, texts, activities, and exercises to be aware of how the materials are presented in the book. Then, a Microsoft Excel sheet was designed to tabulate the results of the analysis by keeping a record of any instance of these three types of cultural content. After that, the text-based materials were thoroughly read page by page and lesson by lesson to identify the culturally loaded concepts. the cultural themes were extracted, abstracted, and written down in the Excel sheet. To recheck the reliability of the data extraction and codification, two measures were taken into account: First, intra-coder reliability by rechecking the results by the researcher a week after the initial data extraction; Second, inter-coder reliability by asking an EFL expert (one of the co-authors) to do data extraction, abstraction, and codification independently and

the results were compared to those of the first coder. The similarity indexes of the intercoder reliability were 91 and 84 percent for the Vision and Touchstone series respectively. By collecting instances of big "C" and small "c" cultures, the analysis of the framework provided a comprehensive approach to understanding intercultural communication and how culture shapes communication practices and norms.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this phase, the researchers analyzed two textbooks using a quantitative content analysis. Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 24). The data in this type of research can be both quantitative and qualitative. According to Coe & Scacco (2017), in quantitative content analysis, text analysis is conducted by systematically categorizing its features. This study took the content analysis procedures suggested by Krippendorff (2019). To this end, first, the corpus of the analysis was determined. It was the written and pictorial contents of two textbook series: Vision (a senior high school English textbook produced in an expanding circle country) and Touchstone (an English textbook produced in an inner circle country used in the Iranian English language institutes. Out of the available items in the coursebook package, only the student book contents were analyzed. Then, a framework or model was adopted to analyze the data Here, Xiao's (2010) modified version of the checklist initially introduced by Chen (2004) and Lees (2009) was adopted to extract the cultural themes. After that, the unit of analysis was set to be a word or combination of words representing a unified cultural concept. The researchers adopted a deductive, a priori approach to extract the instances of cultural representations based on the predefined framework from the six Vision and Touchstone textbooks. Having identified the framework and the unit of analysis, the coding process started and the extracted codes were written down, summarized, and finally recorded in a Microsoft Excel Sheet. The frequency and percentage of the cultural themes were, then, computed. Quantitative data focuses on presenting the amount (percentage and frequency) of cultural themes in these two textbooks to compare them from a thematic point of view. Using SPSS, a chi-square test was run to find out whether or not the difference between these textbook series was statistically significant with respect to these cultural themes.

RESULTS

With all the data collected from six textbooks, data analysis started by addressing the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

To address the first and second research questions, the descriptive statistics of the frequency and percentage of cultural themes extracted from a quantitative content analysis of the Vision and Touchstone textbooks were tabulated based on the textbooks and the cultural themes. This could facilitate the comparison of cultural themes within and across the textbooks. Table 2 presents the distribution of the nine big 'C' frequencies and percentages in the Vision series. The descriptive statistics revealed that in Vision 1, geography, with a meaningful distance history and education were the most frequent big 'C' themes among others while politics, economy, and architecture with no instances were the least frequent themes. In Vision 2, geography, art/literature, and education, were the most frequent, and music, politics, and architecture were the lowest frequent big 'C' themes. In Vision 3, education, art/literature, and geography were the most frequent big 'C' themes; Music, social norms, economy, and politics with no instances available were the least frequent ones. A comparative analysis of the Big C theme indicated that geography (49.3%), education (19.8%), and art/literature (17.1%) were the most frequent, and music (0.44%), politics (o.44%), and architecture (0.89%) were the least frequent themes in Iranian high school English textbooks. The Chi-Square analysis of the differences between the frequency distributions of nine big "C" showed a statistically significant difference within the Vision series.

Table 2
Big C themes: Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Themes in the Vision Series

Textbooks		Politics	History	Economy	Geography	Art/ Literature	Social norms	Education	Architecture	Music	Total
Vision1	N	0	8	0	76	2	1	6	0	1	94
	%	0	8.51	0	80.85	2.12	1.06	6.39	0	1.06	100
Vision2	N	1	5	3	26	17	5	13	1	0	71
	%	1.40	7.04	4.22	36.61	23.95	7.04	18.31	1.40	0	100
Vision3	N	0	5	0	10	20	0	26	1	0	62
	%	0	8.07	0	16.12	32.25	0	41.94	1.61	0	100
Total Frequency Percentage	N	1	18	3	112	39	6	45	2	1	227
	%	0.44	7.92	1.32	49.33	17.19	2.64	19.82	0.89	0.44	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases		Value		df		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)				
	227		632.000[a]		16		.000				

Table 3 presents the distribution of seven small c themes in the Vision series. The descriptive statistics revealed that in Vision 1, values, lifestyle, and food were the most frequent small c themes, and gesture/body language, customs, and holidays were the least frequent themes. In Vision 2, lifestyle, hobbies, and values were the most frequent, and gesture/body language, customs, and holidays, like Vision 1 were the least frequent small c themes. In Vision 3, values, lifestyle, and food were the most frequent small c themes; customs, gesture/body language, and holidays were the least frequent ones. A comparative analysis of the small c themes indicated that lifestyle (37.85%), values (28.24%), and hobbies (16.39%) were the most frequent, and customs (0.56%), gesture/body language (1.12%), and holiday (2.82%) were the least frequent themes in Iranian high school English textbooks. The Chi-Square analysis of the differences between the frequency distributions of seven small c themes showed a statistically significant difference within the Vision series.

Table 3

Small c Themes: Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Themes in the Vision Series

Textbooks		Food	Holiday	Lifestyle	Customs	Values	Hobbies	Gesture/ Body Lang	Total
Vision1	N	8	1	13	0	21	7	0	50
	%	16	2	26	0	42	14	0	100
Vision2	N	9	2	38	1	10	11	1	72
	%	12.50	2.77	52.78	1.39	13.89	15.28	1.39	100
Vision3	N	6	2	16	0	19	11	1	55
	%	10.90	3.64	29.09	0	34.55	20	1.82	100
Total Frequency Percentage	N	23	5	67	1	50	29	2	177
	%	12.99	2.82	37.85	0.56	28.24	16.39	1.12	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases		Value		df		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)		
	177		267.000[a]		12		.002		

Having completed the analysis of the Vision textbook, the frequency and percentage of the nine big 'C' content themes in the Touchstone series were tabulated (see Table 4). The descriptive statistics revealed that in Touchstone 2, social norms, education, and geography were the most frequent big 'C' themes; however, economy, architecture, and art/literature were the least frequent themes. In Touchstone 3, social norms, geography, and education, were the most frequent, and music, politics, and economy were the lowest frequent big 'C' themes. In Touchstone 4, education, geography, and social norms were the most frequent big 'C' themes; architecture, politics, and art/literature were the least frequent ones. A comparative analysis of the Big C theme indicated that social norms (33.8%), geography (28.1%), and education (26.4%) were the most frequent, and politics (0.62%), architecture (0.71%), and economy (1.6%) were the least frequent themes in three textbooks. The Chi-Square analysis of the differences between the frequency distributions of nine big "C" themes indicated a statistically significant difference within the Touchstone series.

Table 4

Big C Themes: Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Themes in the Touchstone Series

Textbooks		Politics	History	Economy	Geography	Art/ Literature	Social norms	Education	Architecture	Music	Total
Touchstone 2	N	0	10	1	82	7	110	99	6	26	341
	%	0	2.93	0.29	24.04	2.05	32.25	29.03	1.75	7.62	100
Touchstone 3	N	4	13	6	132	13	171	96	0	1	436
	%	0.91	2.98	1.37	30.27	2.99	39.22	22.01	0	0.23	100
Touchstone 4	N	3	3	11	102	8	99	102	2	17	347
	%	0.86	0.86	3.17	29.40	2.30	28.53	29.40	0.58	4.90	100
Total Frequency Percentage	N	7	26	18	316	28	380	297	8	44	1124
	%	0.62	2.31	1.60	28.11	2.50	33.80	26.42	0.71	3.91	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases		Value		df			Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)			
	1124		736.000[a]		16			.000			

Table 5 presents the distribution of seven small 'c' themes in the Touchstone series. The descriptive statistics revealed that in Touchstone 2, lifestyle, hobbies, and values were the most frequent small 'c' themes, and gesture/body language and food were the least frequent themes. In Touchstone 3, lifestyle, values, and hobbies were the most frequent, and gesture/body language, holiday, and food were the least frequent small 'c' themes. In Touchstone 4, lifestyle, values, and hobbies were the most frequent small 'c' themes; gesture/body language, customs, and food were the least frequent ones. A comparative analysis of the small c themes indicated that lifestyle (42.40%), values (25.35%), and hobbies (15.92%) were the most frequent, and gesture/body language (0.1%), customs (4.56%), and food (5.57%) were the least frequent themes in three textbooks of Touchstone. The Chi-Square analysis of the differences between the frequency distributions of seven small "c" themes showed a statistically significant difference within the Vision series.

Table 5
Small c Themes: Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Themes in the Touchstone Series

Textbooks		Food	Holiday	Lifestyle	Customs	Values	Hobbies	Gesture/ Body Lang	Total
Touchstone 2	N	9	10	110	10	70	77	1	287
	%	3.13	3.49	38.32	3.49	24.39	26.82	0.35	100
Touchstone 3	N	27	27	176	19	85	40	0	374
	%	7.21	7.21	47.06	5.09	22.73	10.70	0	100
Touchstone 4	N	19	23	132	16	95	40	0	325
	%	5.85	7.08	40.61	4.92	29.24	12.30	0	100
Total Frequency Percentage	N	55	60	418	45	250	157	1	986
	%	5.57	6.08	42.40	4.56	25.35	15.92	0.10	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases		Value		df		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)		
	986		267.000a		12		.021		

To address the third research question, the researcher compared the frequency and proportion of the cultural theme in the Vision and Touchstone series.

As can be noticed in Table 6, the Vision and Touchstone series represent all nine types of Big C cultural themes yet with different degrees. Both textbooks had geography and education among the most frequent themes; nevertheless, art/literature and social norms were among the frequent themes of the Vision and Touchstone series respectively. Similarly, while both textbooks shared architecture and politics as the least frequent themes, Music in the Vision and Economy in the Touchstone were also included among the least frequent big "C" themes. Figure 1 depicts the overall frequency of the themes in two textbooks. The results of the Chi-Square analysis also revealed a significant difference between the book series regarding the distribution of their big "C" themes. To determine the intensity, Cramer's V was preferred to Phi coefficient since the former is used for larger than 2 by 2 cross-tabulations (Cohen, et al., 2018). The results indicated the Cramer's V value of 1.000 at 0.01 level of significance, which is considered a large effect size (Cohen et al., 2018), showing that the Touchstone collection is more successful in dealing with large and wide-ranging cultural Big "c" themes.
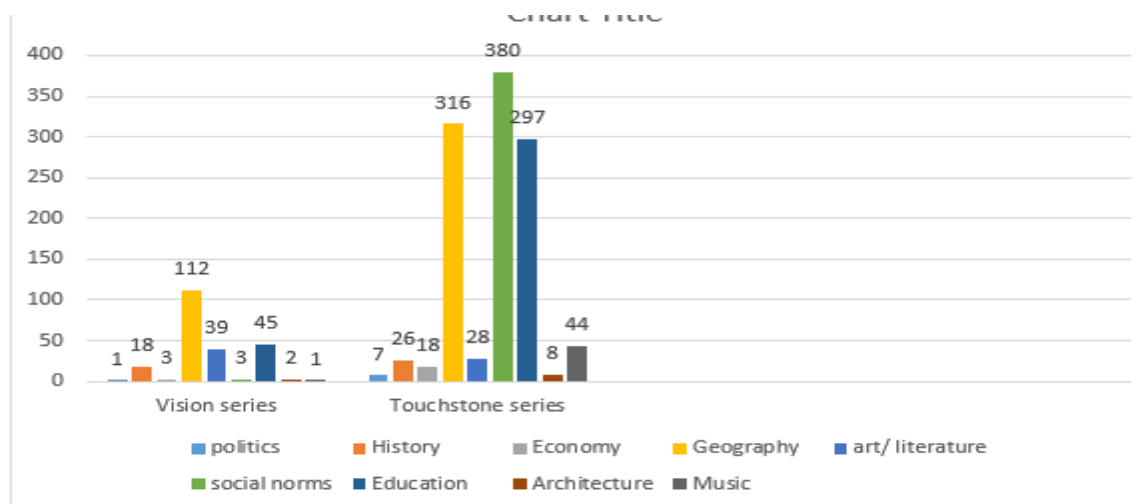
Table 6
Frequency and Percentages of Big C Themes in the Touchstone and Vision Series

Textbook		Politics	History	Economy	Geography	art/ literature	social norms	Education	Architecture	Music	Total
Vision series	N	1	18	3	112	39	6	45	2	1	227
	%	0.44	7.92	1.32	49.33	17.19	2.64	19.82	0.89	0.44	100
Touchstone series	N	7	26	18	316	28	380	297	8	44	1124
	%	0.62	2.31	1.60	28.11	2.50	33.80	26.42	0.71	3.91	100
Total	N	8	44	21	428	67	386	342	10	45	1351
	%	0.60	3.25	1.55	31.69	4.95	28.58	25.31	0.74	3.33	100

Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	1351	462.000	8	0.000

Figure 1
Frequency and Percentages of Big "C" Themes in the Touchstone and Vision Series

As can be noticed in Table 7, the Vision and Touchstone textbooks represent all seven types of small "c" cultural themes again with varying degrees. Both textbooks share lifestyle and values as the most frequent themes and gesture/body language, and customs as the least frequent themes of the Vision and Touchstone series respectively. Figure 2 depicts the overall frequency of the themes in two textbooks. Another Chi-Square indicated a significant difference between the two textbooks regarding the distribution of their big "C" themes. To measure its effect size, i.e., the strength of the association, Cramer's V value was 1.000 at 0.01 level of significance which is considered a large effect size (Cohen et al., 2018), showing that the Touchstone collection is more successful in dealing with large and wide-ranging cultural big "c" themes

Table 7
Frequency and Percentages of Small "c" Themes in the Touchstone and Vision Series

Textbook		Food	Holiday	Lifestyle	Customs	Values	Hobbies	Gestures/ body language	Total
Vision series	N	23	5	67	1	50	29	2	177
	%	12.99	2.82	37.85	0.56	28.24	16.39	1.12	100
Touchstone series	N	55	60	418	45	250	157	1	986
	%	5.57	6.08	42.40	4.56	25.35	15.92	0.10	100
Total	N	78	65	485	46	300	186	3	1163
	%	6.70	5.59	41.70	3.95	25.80	16	0.26	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases		Value		df		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)		
	1163		369.000		6		.000		

Figure 2
Instances of Frequency and Percentages of Small c Themes in the Touchstone and Vision Series
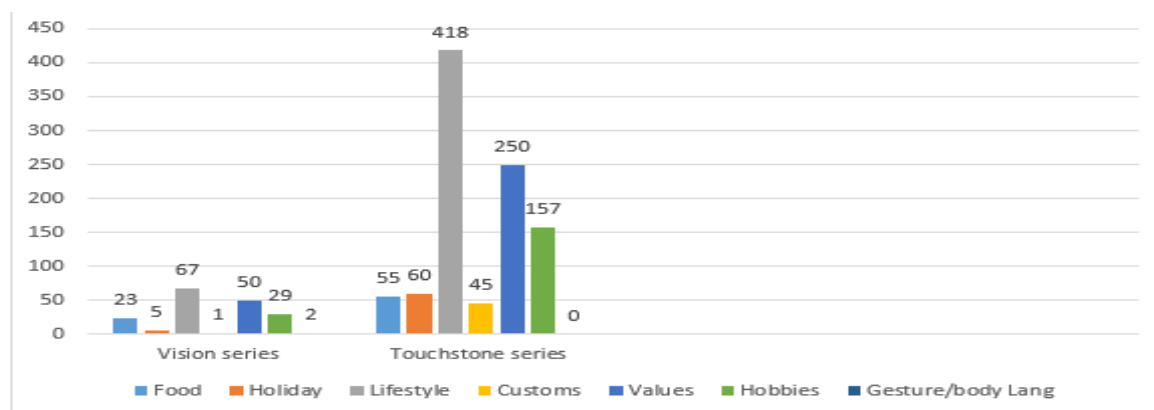
To depict a more vivid image of the cultural themes within any textbook, the researchers compared the distribution of Big C and Small c in both textbooks separately. The comparative analysis of these cultural theme representations was tabulated in Table 8. As shown in Figure 3, the Vision series is dominated by the big 'C' cultural themes (56.18%) compared to the small 'c' (43.82%). Running a Chi-Square test, the results also confirmed a significant difference between these two cultural themes in the Iranian high school English textbook. In other words, high school students are expected to be more familiar with "geography, education, art/literature" than with "lifestyles, values, ideas, hobbies, and gesture/body language".
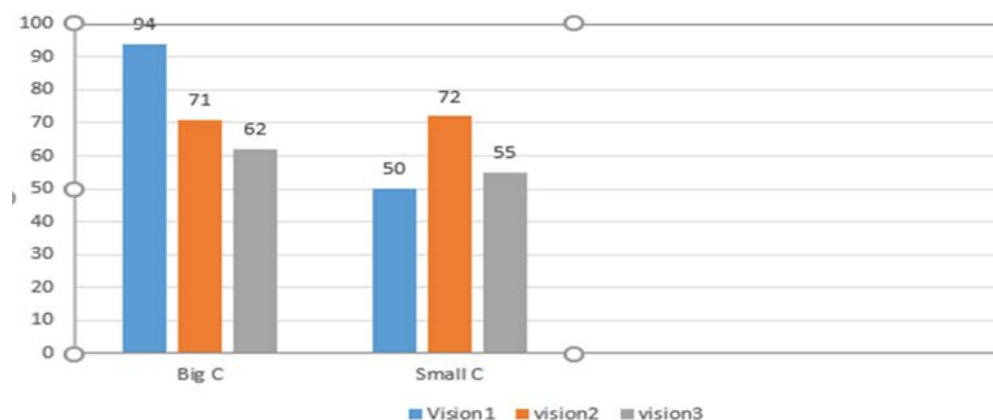
Table 8

Both Big "C" & Small "c": Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Themes in the Vision Series

Textbooks		Big C	Small c	Total
Vision 1	N	94	50	144
	%	65.28	34.72	100
Vision 2	N	71	72	143
	%	49.65	50.35	100
Vision 3	N	62	55	117
	%	53	47	100
Total	N	227	177	404
	%	56.18	43.82	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	404	119.000	2	0.000

Figure 3

Instances of big C and small c culture in the Vision series

As a result, we can conclude that there were significant differences among the three textbooks in the Vision series concerning Big C and Small c cultures. Vision 1 analysis depicted the highest Big C themes and Vision 3 has the lowest ones. Regarding small c, Vision 2 has the highest cultural theme representation.
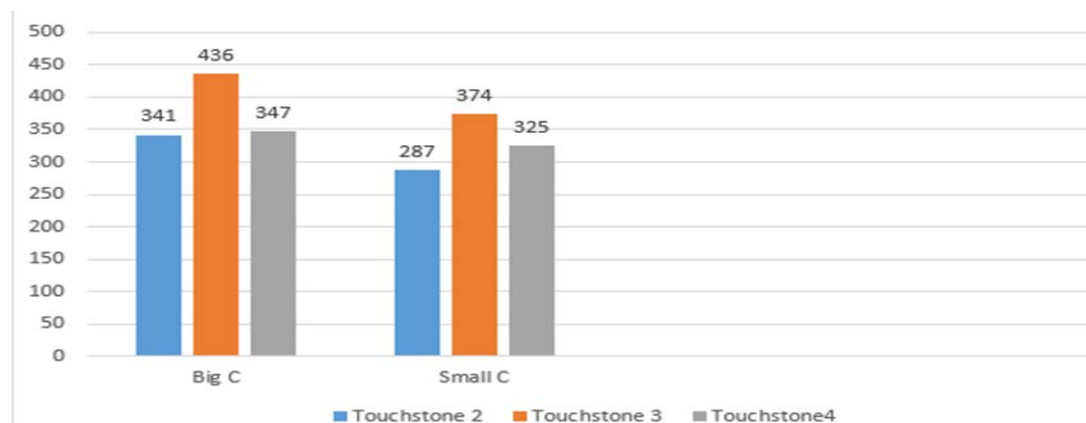
Table 9

Both Big C & Small c: Frequency and Percentage of Cultural Themes in the Touchstone Series

Textbooks		Big C	Small c	Total
Touchtone 2	N	341	287	628
	%	54.30	45.70	100
Touchstone 3	N	436	374	810
	%	53.82	46.185	100
Touchstone 4	N	347	325	672
	%	51.63	48.37	100
Total	N	1124	986	2110
	%	53.27	46.73	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	2110	328.00	2	.031

As shown in Table 9, the percentage of big 'C' cultural themes is the highest (53.27%) among the three textbooks. In other words, the three textbooks were prominently influenced by Big C cultural themes, as opposed to Small c themes. In other words, language learners can be more familiar with "social norms, geography, education, and music" than with "lifestyles, values, hobbies, and holidays". Statistically speaking, there is also a meaningful difference between all three textbooks regarding the big 'C' and small 'c' themes with a Chi-square index of 328.00 with a degree of freedom of 2 at the significance level of 0.031.

Figure 4
Instances of big C and small c culture in the Touchstone series

The following table displays the distribution of Big C and Small c cultural themes extracted from both textbooks. The above graphs show that the frequency of Big C and Small c culture themes in Touchstone 3 is more than in the other textbooks. However, Big C themes are more frequent than Small c. In answer to the third research question, it can be concluded that Big C themes in both the Vision and Touchstone series are the most prominent cultural themes.

Table 10
Frequency and Percentages of Big C & Small C Themes in the Touchstone and Vision Series

Textbooks		Big C	Small c	Total
Vision series	N	227	177	404
	%	56.18	43.82	100
Touchstone Series	N	1124	986	2110
	%	53.27	46.73	100
Total	N	1351	1163	2514
	%	53.73	46.27	100
Pearson Chi-Square	N of Valid Cases	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	2514	583.00	2	.000

Based on the data in Table 10, the percentage of big 'C' cultural themes is found to be the highest (53.73%) among the two textbooks. Based on the analysis conducted, it is evident that the two EFL textbooks were prominently influenced by Big 'C' cultural themes, as opposed to Small "c" themes. In other words, Big "C" themes are highly dominant in the Vision and Touchstone series. In fact, language learners can be more familiar with "geography, education, art/literature" than with "lifestyles, values, ideas, hobbies, and gesture/body language". Statistically speaking, there is also a significant difference between all three textbooks regarding Big "C" and Small "c" themes with a Chi-square index of 583.000 at the significance level of 0.000. In order to determine the intensity, Cramer's V value was 1.000 with a significance level of 0.000, which shows the intensity of the difference that the Touchstone collection is more successful in dealing with large and wide-ranging cultural Big "C" and Small "c" themes.

Table 11
Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi coefficient	1.000	.000
	Cramer's V	1.000	.000

The results display Cramer's effect size in Symmetric Measures (Table 11). The effect size is greater if Cramer's v-value is greater than 0.5, but it is smaller if it is between 0 and 0.5. While not particularly large, the v-value of 1.000 found in this study was significant. It can be concluded that both textbooks addressed cultural issues; nevertheless, the textbooks authored and published by writers from the inner circle countries—native language writers—represented cultural themes more recurrently than those from the expanding circle countries—Iranian authors.

Figure 5
Distribution of Big C and Small c cultural themes in Vision and Touchstone Textbooks
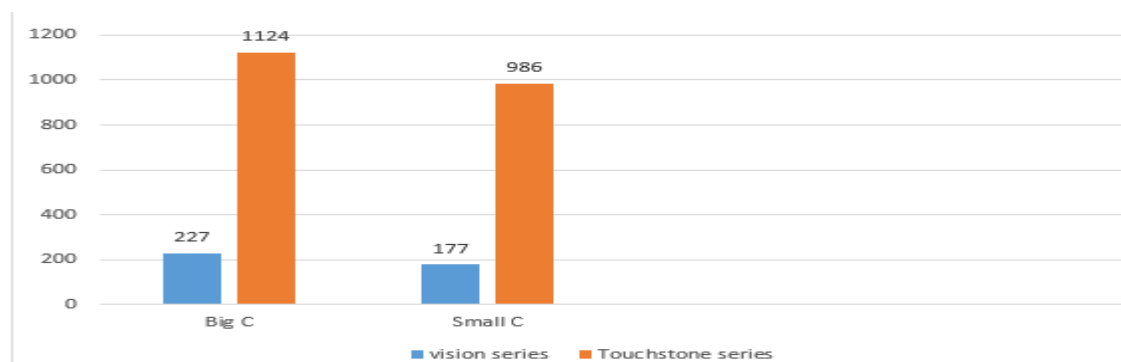
Furthermore, the frequency of Big C culture is more than Small c culture in all the corpus under investigation. The Big C and Small c themes extracted from the "Touchstone" were more recurrent than those in the Vision. The figure reveals that Touchstone, as an example of inner circle country textbooks, has more Big C and Small c cultural themes than Vision textbooks as an expanding-circle countries textbooks. With regard to this issue, the findings indicated a statistically significant difference between these two textbooks under study. The results support a higher frequency for L2 cultural themes in international textbooks (Touchstone) and a higher tendency towards L1 cultural theme representation in local textbooks (Vision). In order to help students and teachers of English as a foreign language learn more about culture and better prepare them for intercultural communicative competence, this study provides some insight into the kinds of cultural information covered in English textbooks.

DISCUSSION

This study was a comparative analysis of the cultural themes of six in-use English textbooks in Iranian high schools and language institutes regarding cultural Big "C" and small "c" themes. The data suggest that although the percentage of each theme was varied and not balanced, the books have covered a wide range of Big "C" cultural themes, namely Geography, Social norms, Education, arts, and music more than Small "c", Lifestyle, Values and food. Politics and Architecture in Big "C" and Gestures/ body language in Small "c" are the lowest cultural themes in both textbooks. It revealed that Big C cultural themes are more prominent in both books than Small c themes. There may be more cultures being taught to students than just the objective or readily visible cultures, as evidenced by a slight variation in the frequency of Big "C" and Small "c" cultures in the textbooks (e.g., music, writing, geography), but also the hidden or subjective facets of hidden cultures (e.g. daily life, social interactions, and customs).

The current study's findings were inconsistent with earlier studies on the representation of cultural components in coursebooks. Top Notch series primarily focused on three minor cultural themes concerning everyday life, cuisine, traditions, and rules, as well as one major cultural theme, geography. This was established by examining the frequency

and proportion of ten cultural themes (six categorized as big "C" culture and four as small "c" culture) in three EFL textbook series: Passages (Richards & Sandy, 2005), Summit (Saslow & Ascher, 2011), and Top Notch (Saslow & Ascher, 2011). Moreover, the results of Liu & Laohawiriyanon's (2013) study, which identified 19 cultural themes in EFL college English textbooks for Chinese non-English majors, contradicted the findings of this study. Remarkably, representing 58.08 percent of the cases, the small c culture of value was the most common cultural theme in listening tasks. Liu and Laohawiriyanon (2013) conducted a study on an EFL textbook at a college and found that the main focus is on the importance of small "c". The results of the study by Matic (2015) revealed a higher prevalence of small 'c' cultural topics (57.1%) compared to big 'C' topics (42.9%) in EFL materials for Integrated Skills classes at the Belgrade Department of English in the second year of studies. These results strongly underline the stance of multiple scholars who argue that Small c is highly beneficial in enhancing students' ability to communicate across cultures (Wintergerst & Mcveigh, 2010). Chutong and Thongrin (2020) discovered that EFL textbooks incorporate both Big C and Small c cultural elements, but tend to lean towards highlighting Big C culture, especially in specialized English courses like tourism. Lasekan et al. (2024) found that the "Headway" series emphasizes Small C cultural aspects across all skill levels, gradually integrating Big C cultural aspects as students advance. This instructional method prioritizes developing learners' abilities in everyday social interactions and cultural nuances before delving into more intricate communication in real-world scenarios (Faiza & Sakina, 2022). Furthermore, Alhaj and Alwadai (2023) emphasize the significance of including both Big C and Small c themes in textbooks to promote linguistic and cultural fluency among learners. This involves offering well-rounded cultural content that covers both the institutional (Big C) and the everyday (Small c) aspects. The study supports the suggestions made by Gomez Rodríguez (2015) and Amerian & Tajabadi (2020) that EFL textbooks need to offer a well-rounded perspective on culture to improve learners' ability to communicate in a variety of cultural environments.

The findings of this study showed that the Touchstone and Vision series textbooks had big 'C' themes as the most common cultural themes. The results support the studies conducted by Rostami and Zakidizaji, (2021) revealing that most of the cultural material in the conversation textbooks used in Iran and Korea focuses on Big C themes of culture like art, history, and geography. They decided that 11 EFL textbooks were unsuitable for promoting Korean students' Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) because they did not explain the concept of the small 'c'. Likewise, Chen (2004) examined Chinese EFL textbooks regarding the portrayal of cultural themes and found that the content was largely focused on Big 'C' culture. The findings further corroborate the notion put forth by Paige et al. (2003). They stated that the concept of big C covers various quantitative data and factual details relating to the history, art, education, geography, and traditions of the specific speech community. On the other hand, the lowercase "c" denotes the hidden elements of the target culture society, like norms, ideologies, and sociocultural factors like age, gender, and social status (Lee, 2009). He further added that students often remember cultural aspects linked to the larger "C" category easily, while grasping the smaller "c" is especially important. This is due to the fact that socio-cultural ethics, norms, values, and beliefs impact thought processes, beliefs, and language usage. Additionally, understanding the minor "c" can help learners grasp how individuals in the specific community utilize their language correctly (Lee, 2009). The results of the current study pointed out that formal elements such as literature, history, and prominent societal institutions were given more emphasis in the textbooks. Nonetheless, the research discovered a significant lack of representation of small "c" culture in English-speaking societies, including everyday social practices, conversational norms, and daily life nuances. This lack of balance indicates a narrow emphasis on developing practical intercultural skills since understanding small "c" cultures can assist learners in effectively engaging in real-life cultural exchanges. Thus, this study has been in line with recent research, indicating that the EFL textbooks prioritize Big C culture, highlighting formal aspects like history, literature, and art. This indicates that Iranian textbooks mainly focus on tangible cultural aspects but also include small c aspects to provide a comprehensive cultural understanding that supports language skills and intercultural awareness.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that the frequency of the cultural themes was imbalanced since the textbooks were different in their cultural content. The EFL textbooks taught in EFL classes in an expanding country like Iran contain more Big C cultural themes than Small C themes, which has remarkable pedagogical implications The information shows that as learners progress in proficiency, there is a gradual increase in the presence of "Big C" cultural elements like Art, Economy, Education, Geography, History, Institutions, and Literature. This reflects a pedagogical approach to

introduce learners to more intricate cultural concepts as their linguistic skills improve (Rodríguez, 2018). On the other hand, essential cultural aspects like Daily Life, Social Interactions, and Etiquette consistently prevail at all stages, highlighting vital everyday cultural customs essential for effective communication and interactions in reality (Syarif & Mulyono, 2023). The uneven focus on Big C concepts over Small c elements in the "Touchstone" and "Vision" series promotes formal education in cultural subjects without emphasizing practical communication skills. This study recommends that authors take into account the needs and preferences of students and educators regarding Intercultural communication when developing educational materials. By creating interesting materials that incorporate a mix of important themes, students are more inclined to actively engage in learning language and culture through authentic communication. Additionally, developers should incorporate various topics and tasks to cater to diverse learners. EFL instructors should also strive to diagnose students' cultural interests and prepare supplementary content and materials like videos, storybooks, and images if the textbooks lack ample cultural content. Educators can undergo training to learn strategies to actively involve students in culture-related tasks. As a recommendation, it could be worthwhile to look into how teachers respond to including cultural information in language learning skills and the disappearance of themes related to "body language" and "politics" from Small c and Big C cultures in the textbooks.

The primary limitation of this research was the textbooks under investigation and the size of the corpus. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further studies with a larger corpus size before drawing definitive conclusions. Additionally, more research is expected to adopt other textbooks authored by both native and non-native authors in order to establish valid generalizations. This study employed a simple comparative design to explore cultural theme distribution in two textbooks. To delve deeper into the issue of integrating culture and language teaching, future studies should consider employing different designs, such as descriptive and survey designs, to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students. This way we can obtain more robust and reliable results.

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