



## A Content Analysis of Multicultural Representations of Textbooks in Expanding Circle Countries: A Case of Vision Series in Iran

Mahdieh Sadeghzadegan<sup>1</sup>, Mojtaba Mohammadi<sup>\*2</sup>, Abdollah Baradaran<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Language Teaching, West Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

Email: mahdiesadeghzadegan@gmail.com

Email: abdollahbaradaran@gmail.com

\*Corresponding Author's Email: mojtabamohammadi@gmail.com

Received: 29-09-2023, Accepted: 02-01-2024

### ABSTRACT

*With the dissemination of the concept of intercultural citizenship and the growing demand for citizens to communicate in settings with a kaleidoscopic array of cultural diversity, EFL textbooks should reflect these multicultural values besides their attention to language. This study examines cultural contents/themes from written passages and pictures of Vision series, the Iranian senior high school textbooks. To this end, the cultural contents (source, target, international cultures) and cultural themes (big 'C' and little 'c') were qualitatively extracted. The results of the quantitative content analysis revealed that there were not any significant differences among the three books in terms of cultural categories. However, source cultural content gained higher frequency as compared to others; Big 'C' themes gained statistically more frequency than the little 'c' which could be the aftermath of the authors' sole focus on L1 communicative competence. The study further concludes that the textbooks failed to foster intercultural communicative competence and intercultural communication. The findings have implications for syllabus designers and material developers to integrate the principles of English as an international language in their practice by further including target and international cultural content types.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Contents; EFL Textbooks; Intercultural Communication; Vision Series

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of today's globalized multicultural world, it seems inconceivable to learn/teach a foreign language independent of its culture (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). The development of technology and the expansion of social networks and multifarious sources of information have overhauled the meaning of culture in language learning (Kramsch & Zhu, 2020). Scholars have taken various stances toward culture and language learning. For some, successful language learners learn them together and shape a firmly integrated bond between language and culture (Ho, 2009). Some others even view culture as the primary reason for learning a foreign language "to experience a different culture from the inside" (Kim, 2020, p. 520). Language learning is considered to be "the expansion of the individual's cultural horizons, the development of tolerance for cultural diversity, and the acquisition of more data for deciding where one fits in the world" (Hartman & Judd, 1978, p. 383). Widdowson (1990) stated that the process of interpretation of meanings is the result of systemic knowledge or "knowledge of formal properties of language" as well as the schematic knowledge or the knowledge of the "particular world we live in, our beliefs, ideas, experiences, cultural values, ..." (p. 163). This latter one resorts to socially acquired concepts and discusses that cultural cognition of English as a Lingua franca leads to foreign language acquisition. A particular language is a



mirror image of a particular culture and a culture is a complex and multi-dimensional concept interrelated with language.

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE THE MEANING OF CULTURE**

There are some theoretical views regarding culture and scholars in different fields have defined it differently (Rokhsari, 2023). In the metaphoric Iceberg model of culture presented by Hall (1976), he proposed two basic components of culture, the visible culture which takes around 10% of the culture including behaviors, traditions, and customs, ... is on the surface and invisible culture which accounts for 90% of the culture hidden beneath the surface. The visible culture is static, observable, and easily changeable and learned. This refers to such items as food, geography, celebrations, and clothing in EFL textbooks. These elements are representative of a nation to state the underlying sociocultural interactions occurring in different backgrounds (Hinkel, 2001). Additionally, unconscious feelings, beliefs, lifestyles, values, and sociocultural norms are invisible or deep cultural knowledge. It strongly correlates to intercultural development while the surface culture does not involve sociocultural norms, values, and attitudes. Shaules (2007, p. 12) claimed that deep culture, as one of the major challenges of a learning culture, is not profoundly noticed or understood in many intercultural contexts. Hinkel (2001) added that surface culture is easily observable in a nation, but deep culture is the hidden parts embracing hidden meanings related to a region, a group of people, and a particular culture. A few other theoretical views on culture refer to a dichotomous concept of “big ‘C’ and little ‘c’ by Battista (1984), “Objective and Subjective culture” by Bennett (1993), and “big ‘C’ and Little ‘c’ offered by Chen (2004) and Lee (2009) on the themes and then modified by Xiao (2010) in ELT educational system. Xiao (2010) stated that big C culture is one “which focuses on the products and contribution to a society and its outstanding individuals, including politics, economy, literature, fine arts, sciences, geography” (p. 6), while little c “refers to the way of life, daily living, and culture patterns including the routine aspects of life, such as food, holidays, lifestyles, customs, values, etc.” (p. 6). She added that more attention should have been given to ‘little/little c’ in language classes. Wintergerst and McVeigh (2010) explained, “Learners with both big and little cultural themes/elements awareness can encounter intercultural settings issues in an efficient way” (p. 46).

Cross-cultural communication has been considered an essential goal for language learning in the 60s (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). In other words, culture as a rule for the routine lifestyle of people has come into sight in the field of the EFL education system (Bateman & Mattos, 2006). Language and culture have expanded because of the advent of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). This competence has been considered a complementary concept of Chomsky’s linguistic competence and is defined as a skill or ability to use a language in specific contexts as well. communicative competence, according to the definition by Canale and Swain (1980), is a construct composed of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and communication strategies or strategic competence. Because of using different social factors in different communicative contexts, the novel concept of communicative competence has garnered substantial scholarly interest and undergone a process of reconceptualization over time as well as moving away from the first language (L1) speaker model. Kramsch (1993) explained that after years of enthusiastically embracing the concept of the communicative approach, some language teachers began to show dissatisfaction with its purely functional uses of language and were advocating the integration of some “intellectually legitimate, humanistically oriented, and cultural content” (p. 83) into the traditional concept of communication skills. Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000) surpassed mere linguistic references and expounded the concept of pragmatics that includes “people’s intentions, assumptions, beliefs, goals” that are socio-culturally appropriate (p. 19). In this regard, Celce-Murcia (2007) notifies ELT practitioners and states, “If the goal of language instruction is communicative competence, language instruction must be integrated with cultural and cross-cultural instruction.” (p. 51). Moreover, in the 21st century, some scholars Alptekin (2002), Corbett (2003), Lee (2012), and Piątkowska (2015) have focused more attention on developing skills related to cross-cultural communication. Because of globalization, communication has become ever more intercultural, multicultural, and meta-cultural in nature in today’s world; therefore, L1 / L2 speakers should develop their intercultural communication skills. With the advent of technological affordances and further dissemination of social media, the concept of culture in language learning has turned to experience a metamorphosis. Internationalization, on the one hand, and the growing multiliteracies especially digital literacy, on the other hand, raise the demand for language learners to try to empower themselves to participate in “democratic processes [to go] beyond the limits of their own country” (Byram, 2021, p. 57). These influential factors brought up the concept of “intercultural



citizenship” which considers intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as its foundation. Byram (2021) further claims that the purpose of foreign language education is to “link foreign language education to education for citizenship” (p. 29).

### **THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS**

EFL textbooks as social products are representative of material conditions for teaching and learning and indicators of the need for teachers and learners to build intercultural communication. There are differing views toward the cultural values of the textbooks with an emphasis on the proponents. The opponents believe that language teachers should not solely rely on textbooks since it seems “rather difficult for language learning textbooks to provide a rich mix of intercultural exposure” (Orsini-jones & Lee, 2018, p. 16). The proponents, however, view textbooks as more valuable in learning/teaching culture. As Victor (1999) and Majdzadeh (2002) stated, textbooks are expected to include target and global culture besides the home culture since learners need to go beyond the linguistic border of communication. Tomlinson (2011) believed that textbooks are based on language input, practice, and activities in class. McGrath (2002) added that textbooks are important because of tending to guide the content and the way of learning a lesson. Yamada (2006) asserts that textbooks are considered “curricular materials, which project images of society and culture. They reflect historical, social, cultural, and ideological manifestations. Textbooks have been revised with the shift of sociocultural, economic and political contexts” (p. 20). Anjaneyulu (2014, p. 182) also confirmed that “the analysis of the textbook would yield insights as to its suitability”; therefore, it was highly significant “to examine whether it corresponded to the learners’ needs of the particular situation” (p. 181). Kachru (1985) posits that textbooks are fundamental resources for language acquisition among students in both the expanding and outer circles. In accordance with Kachru's classification, English language users can be categorized into three distinct categories: (1) Inner circle nations, such as the United Kingdom, where English is commonly utilized as a means of traditional cultural and linguistic communication, (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 specific academic goals. In the inner and outer circles, L2 esthetic cultural elements represent more than the expanding circle. In expanding-circle countries like Iran, ELT textbooks highlight L1 esthetic and sociolinguistic cultural elements more than any other cultural content in producing ELT textbooks. Since textbooks are quintessential resources for language acquisition among learners in both the expanding and outer circle countries, the cultural elements in the EFL syllabus should be represented in ELT textbooks and considered one of the biggest concerns in the education system (McConachy & Hata, 2013).

### **EFL TEXTBOOKS IN IRAN**

High school ELT textbooks in Iran, as an expanding circle country, have so far witnessed three major revisions from pre-revolution materials (1939 –79) to the post-revolution English textbooks: 1982 – 90, 1991–2010, and the new English for School Series from 2013 to date. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, ELT received waves of anti-western sentiment which led to the deculturalization of schools because of political and revolutionary opposition against the US and England. Currently, the Prospect series in junior high schools and the Vision series in senior high school have been developed since 2013 and 2016 respectively.

In Iran, a few studies have been conducted on the cultural features of EFL textbooks developed in Iran by the Ministry of Education and some have even compared these with the textbooks authored in the inner circle countries. Asadi, Kiany, Akbari, and Samar (2016) contended that the textbooks developed in Iran over issues such as over-localizing content and the exclusive use of their own cultures and religions. According to Zohrabi, Sabouri, and Behroozian (2012), English textbooks should incorporate communicative tasks that align with the distinctive requirements of learners. Furthermore, it is imperative for textbooks to incorporate exemplars of cultural values that are conducive to enhancing the acquisition of knowledge pertaining to the target culture (Salehi & Amini, 2016). According to Baghermousavi and Nabifar (2016), the textbooks "Prospect" and "Vision" incorporate Iranian cultural and Islamic notions and customs; nonetheless, they appear to neglect the target culture. Other researchers in the local context of this study have carried out numerous studies about cultural aspects represented in EFL senior high school textbooks such as Majdzadeh (2002); Yarmohammadi (2002); Aliakbari (2005); Rashidi and Najafi (2010); Riasati and Zare (2010); Zarei and Khalessi (2011); Khajavi and Abbasian, (2011); Birjandi and Alizadeh (2012); Rajabi and Ketabi (2012); Sharif and Yarmohammadi (2013); Roohani and Molana (2013); Ashraf, Kafi, and Motallebzadeh (2013); Dehbozorgi, Amalsaleh, Kafipour (2014); Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015); Ajideh and



Panahi (2016); Sadeghi and Sepahi (2017); Ghiyasiyan, Seraj, and Bahreini (2017); Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018); Khodabandeh and Mombini (2018); Gholami Pasand and Ghasemi (2018); and Derakhshan (2024). There are a few international studies in the recent literature investigating the textbooks in their local contexts like Algeria (Messekher, 2014), China (Lee & Li, 2020; Liu, 2013; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022), Indonesia (Faris, 2014; Setyono & Widodo, 2019), Pakistan (Ahmed & Narcy-Combes, 2011), South Korea (Su, 2016), Spain (Rodríguez & Espinar, 2015), Lithuania (Hallett, 2021), and Japan (Efron, 2020; Yamada, 2010).

According to the literature, cultural contents and themes have not been comprehensively explored in Iranian high school textbooks in terms of both textual and pictorial content. Furthermore, few studies have analyzed the cultural contents and the gender orientation of these textbooks which have millions of users every year. In order to fill the existing gaps, the researchers attempted to explore cultural categories, cultural contents, and the degree of gender neutrality in a new series of high school textbooks *Vision Series* by delving into both texts and images. These Iranian high school textbooks have been developed by the affiliated organizations of the Ministry of Education since 2016. Furthermore, this research aimed to determine if the materials in the textbooks provided sufficient cultural content for students' cultural awareness, were gender-neutral, and eventually make the cultural presentation and intercultural communication. Regarding this basic need to focus on foreign language learning in expanding countries, this study aims to evaluate Iranian high school textbooks and cultural elements/themes of senior high school textbook *Vision series* introduced in grades 9, 10, and 11 since 2016. This research is based on Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural contents classification/theme as well as Xiao's (2010) final draft of her cultural theme checklist for big 'C' and little 'c' themes or "visible/invisible culture". Based on this gap, the following research questions were investigated:

Q1: Is there a significant difference in the distribution of cultural categories based on Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural evaluation model in three senior high school textbooks "Vision" series?

Q2. Is there a significant difference between male- and female-related cultural contents in three senior high school textbooks, *Vision series*, in Iran?

Q3. Is there a significant difference in the distribution of dimensions in big 'C' and little 'c' cultures suggested by Chen's (2004) and Lee's (2009) modified by Xiao's (2010) Checklist in three high school textbooks, *Vision series*, in Iran?

Q4. What cultural themes predominate within both dimensions in big 'C' and little 'c' culture in senior high school textbooks *Vision series* in Iran?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **MATERIAL**

The material for the current study is *Vision Series* students' books used to learn English in Iranian high schools. The series includes three books, i.e., *Visions 1, 2, and 3* student books, and have been developed by the Public and Secondary Office in 2016 in collaboration with the Iranian Ministry of Education in Iran. They have been taught to Iranian high school students within the age range of 16-19. All four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are included in this high school textbook series. *Vision 1* has four lessons and *Visions 2 and 3* have three lessons each. Every lesson has started with an introduction to the lesson namely the 'Get Ready' section and developed into 'Conversation' and 'New Words' sections by providing new vocabulary items and new information. They also have involved sections such as 'Reading', 'Grammar', 'Listening', 'Speaking', 'Pronunciation', and 'Writing'. In the section 'What You Learned' or reviewing lesson section, students internalize the information obtained in each lesson. The researchers have considered the third edition of the *Vision series* published in 2018. In this study, the whole written text was considered to explore the cultural contents, and the written texts and images of each unit of these three books were considered to conduct the cultural theme analysis. Four different coding schemes were used to demonstrate information respectively: coding scheme for pictures (P), coding schemes for written texts (W), for men or (M), and for women or (Wo) in all lessons of the three books.

**PROCEDURE**

In this descriptive research, the instances of cultural themes and cultural contents were qualitatively detected in the Iranian senior high school English textbooks. This research had two phases.

The first phase entailed a study that predominantly explored the frequency of cultural content and emphasized what and/or which cultures were included. To achieve the cultural contents in these textbooks, Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural evaluation model - target culture, source culture, and international culture - was used as follows:

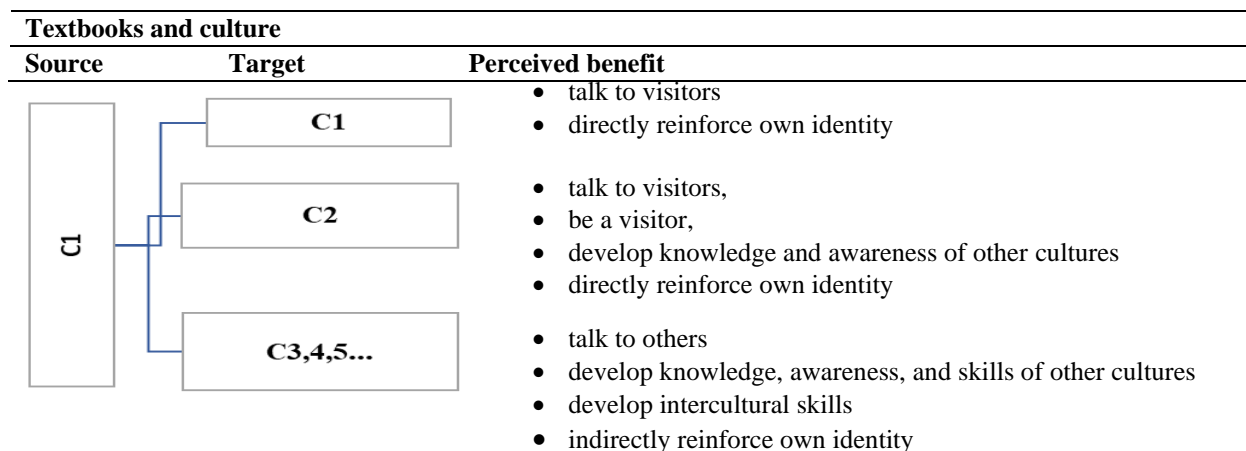


Figure 1. Three patterns in English textbooks that reflect culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p. 204)

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the logic behind the textbooks' classification is to use them in the international situation. The first category in this model is the source culture or a learner's own local culture. The objectives of utilizing source culture (C1) resources are to meet the requirements of students to discuss their cultural background with others, while simultaneously enhancing their sense of self-awareness regarding their own cultural identity. The second category (C2) is Target/Foreign culture where English is spoken as a first language. C3, 4, and 5 refer to the international culture and are used in English- or non-English-speaking countries (Expanding circle countries) around the world. The utilization of international cultural materials enhances the intercultural awareness of users and provides them with exposure to a range of sociocultural contexts. Intercultural competence will not be developed if the textbooks only concentrate on the learners' L1 or target cultures. In other words, intercultural communications take place when people from various cultural groups create similar meanings in their social interactions. In other words, the ability to comprehend and appreciate the language and culture of others while preserving one's cultural values is a crucial aspect of effective communication. This is the fundamental premise of intercultural communication, as expounded in educational materials. The purpose of the above classification is to make available an inclusive image of how culture is manifested separately in high school textbooks in Iran as an expanding circle country. This model's overarching objective is to scrutinize the nature of cultural content embedded in textbooks and undertake a comprehensive exploration of all cultural elements pertaining to any given culture. The second objective is to assess the efficacy of cultural content in fostering the acquisition of cultural competencies among learners. This entails an examination of how learners potentially interpret and classify socio-cultural scenarios, thereby enhancing their cultural skillset. To achieve effective communication, foreign language learners are required to acknowledge cultural elements and their manifestations and subsequently make use of them within the intended context.





The second phase refers to the study that focuses on the types and levels of cultural content such as the big ‘C’ and little ‘c’.

1. Big ‘C’ cultures, according to Xiao (2010), contain nine themes: Governments/Politics, Economy, History, Geography, Literature/Art, Society’s norms, Education, Architecture, and Music.

2. Little ‘c’ cultures, according to Xiao (2010), embody seven themes: Food, Holiday, Living Style, Customs, Beliefs/values, Hobbies, and Gesture/body language.

The study utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to calculate the percentage frequency of all observed items, and to discern the prominence or absence of specific cultural attributes. This statistical analysis was conducted to identify the significant difference between cultural categories and the dimensions of big ‘C’ and little ‘c’ culture among three textbooks in the corpus. Eventually, the frequency and percentages of predominated cultural themes were calculated in both dimensions of big ‘C’ and little ‘c’ cultures; the chi-square statistical procedure was employed to check whether there is a significant difference between cultural contents in the Vision series.

The model in the present investigation focused on evaluating the quantitative aspects such as the percentage and frequency, as well as qualitative facets such as the analysis of contents and themes, and the cultural categories presented in the textbooks. These three books' written texts and images were considered to explore cultural content analysis based on a coding scheme. The written texts and pictures were all coded and categorized in all lessons of the three books. The aggregation of codes was conducted followed by the computation of the corresponding frequency and percentage for each code. In order to enhance the dependability of the analysis, two coders examined the cultural materials present within the three textbooks. The inter-coder reliability index was found to be sufficiently high (0.87), thereby indicating a satisfactory level of agreement between the two raters.

**RESULTS**

The researchers adopted content analysis to analyze the collected data. It is one of the “popular qualitative data analysis procedures ... [which] is usually used to analyze information or content of a text, which can be written, spoken, or visual” (Riazi, 2016, p. 54). To answer the first research question which deals with whether there is a significant difference in the distribution of cultural categories based on Cortazzi and Jin’s (1999) cultural evaluation model in three senior high school textbooks “Vision” series in Iran, the picture and written texts of the books were compared. The researchers, using Excel and SPSS, conducted the statistical analysis to determine the cultural categories and explored if there was a difference between the representation of the dimensions of big ‘C’ and little ‘c’ in the Vision series. Additionally, the frequency and percentages of these themes of related dimensions were calculated to determine what topics predominated. Table 1 shows the comparison of cultural categories among the three textbooks of the Vision series.

Table 1  
Cortazzi and Jin’s (1999) cultural categories in the Vision Series

Textbooks	Cultural Categories				Total
		Source culture (S)	Target culture (T)	International culture (I)	
Vision 1	N	87	3	60	150
	%	58	2	40	100
		41.03	27.27	55	45.18
Vision 2	N	64	4	29	97
	%	65.97	4.12	29.89	100
		30.18	36.36	26.60	29.21
Vision 3	N	61	4	20	85
	%	71.76	4.70	23.52	100



		28.77	36.36	18.34	25.60
Total	N	212	11	109	332
	%	63.85	3.31	32.83	100
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>		Value= 8.020		Sig=0.091	

As shown in Table 1, source culture (63.85%) and target culture (3.31%) have the highest and lowest frequency. The international culture among the three textbooks is (32.83%). In Vision 1, Source Culture is more frequent (58%) than International Culture (40%) and Target Culture (2%). In Vision 2, Source Culture (65.97%) is the highest frequency of the others namely International Culture (29.89%) and Target Culture (4.12%). In Vision 3, Source culture (71.76%) is more than international culture (23.52) and Target culture (4.70). As a result, Vision 1 has the highest frequency of all cultural content categories (45.18%), and Vision 3 has the lowest frequency of cultural content (25.60%) among the three Visions series.

To find out the statistical difference between the three textbooks chi-square was run. The findings of the analysis indicated that there exists no statistical significance in the difference among the books, as measured by the cultural content analyses conducted by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) with a Chi-square index of 8.020 and a significance level of 0.091. According to the above table, compared to the other two categories of culture, Source Culture indicated the highest frequency in Vision 1 (58.0%), 2 (65.97%), 3 (71.76%), and the total index in all three textbooks (63.85%). Target culture, however, shows the lowest frequency (3.31%) in the three textbooks. As a result, it is concluded that these three textbooks have been designed based on enhancing learners' source culture competence rather than international and target culture.

Table 2  
Frequency and Percentages of Gender in Vision Series

Textbook	Male		Female	
	Picture	Written text	Picture	Written text
Vision 1	20	35	8	20
Vision 2	36	27	14	16
Vision 3	23	29	10	10
Total Frequency	79	91	32	46
	N=170		N=78	
Pearson Chi-Square	Value= 0.680		Sig= 0.712	

In all three textbooks, as shown in Table 2, the frequency of male pictures and written texts is more than female texts. In other words, males were more visible and frequent than females in pictures and written texts. However, there were no statistically significant differences between using gender in the written texts and pictures in three high school textbooks. A significant difference ( $0.712 > 0.05$ ) showed gender bias in our senior high school textbooks. To address the third and fourth research questions, the researchers computed the frequency and proportion of cultural themes ascertained from a content analysis of the Vision series. Tables 3 and 4 display the frequency and proportion of big 'C' and little 'c' cultural themes assessed in each book.



Table 3

Big ‘C’ themes: Frequency and percentage of pictorial and written themes

Textbooks		Polit.	Hist.	Eco.	Geog.	Art/Lit.	Social Norms	Edu.	Arch.	Music	Total
Vision 1	N	0	12	0	110	3	1	9	0	1	136
	%	0	8.82	0	80.88	2.20	0.73	6.61	0	0.73	100
Vision 2	N	1	7	4	34	36	17	30	3	0	132
	%	0.75	5.30	3.03	25.75	27.27	12.87	22.72	2.27	0	100
Vision 3	N	0	6	0	14	26	0	32	2	0	80
	%	0	7.50	0	17.50	32.50	0	40	2.50	0	100
Total	N	1	25	4	158	65	18	71	5	1	348
	%	0.28	7.18	1.14	45.40	18.67	5.17	20.40	1.43	0.28	100
Pearson Chi-square				Value= 145.701			Sig=0.000				

The content of Table 3 presents the distribution of the nine big ‘C’ frequencies and percentages in the mentioned textbooks. It showed that there was a statistically significant difference among the nine themes of big C in the Vision series. It can be seen that in Vision 1, geography, history, education, and art/literature are the most frequent big ‘C’ themes among other themes while music and social norms are the lowest frequent themes. Politics, economy, and architecture themes do not exist at all. In Vision 2, art/literature, geography, education, and social norms are the most frequent but politics, architecture, and economy are the lowest frequent big ‘C’ themes. Music has no mention in the textbook. In Vision 3, education, art/literature, and geography are the most frequent big ‘C’ themes; Architecture and history are the least frequent ones. No themes were available for politics, economy, music, and social norms.

A comparative analysis of the data presented in the aforementioned tables elucidates that the high-frequency theme is Geography (80.88%) in Vision 1, art/ literature (27.27%) in Vision 2, and education (40%) in Vision 3. Music, economy, politics, and architecture have the lowest frequency in three high school English textbooks in Iran. Considering the big ‘C’ cultural themes in the three textbooks, it can be concluded that geography (45.40%) is the highest frequency theme, and politics and music (0.28%) are the lowest frequency themes among big ‘C’ themes in the Vision series. After geography, the highest frequency is related to education (20.40%) and art/literature (18.67%) themes of big ‘C’. Similarly, the result of the chi-square (145.701) and a significance level of .000 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference among the three textbooks in terms of their cultural big ‘C’. It is also evident that Vision 1 has included the most cultural big ‘C’ themes and “Vision 3” has the least big C” themes among the three textbooks.





Table 4

Little ‘c’ themes: Frequency and percentages of pictorial and written themes

Textbooks		Food	Holiday	Lifestyle	Customs	Values	Hobbies	Ges. / Body lang.	Total
Vision1	N	10	1	18	1	32	10	0	72
	%	34.48	1.38	25	1.38	44.44	34.48	0	30%
Vision2	N	11	4	49	2	10	18	3	97
	%	11.34	4.12	50.51	2.06	10.30	18.55	3.09	40.41
Vision3	N	8	2	19	0	28	13	2	71
	%	11.26	2.81	26.76	0	39.43	18.30	2.81	29.58
Total	N	29	7	85	3	70	41	5	240
	%	12.08	2.91	35.41	1.25	29.16	14.08	2.08	100
Pearson Chi-Square				Value= 35.945			Sig=0.000		

The data in Table 4 reveals that there are significant differences in terms of little ‘c’ themes in high school English textbooks in Iran. In Vision 1, the theme of values (44.44%) has the highest frequency, and body gestures (2.08%) has the lowest frequency theme. In Vision 2, lifestyle (50.51%) has the most, and custom (2.06%) has the lowest percentage. In Vision 3, the theme of values (39.43%) is the most, and custom (0%) is the lowest theme among the little c themes. The frequency analysis revealed that lifestyle (35.41%) has the highest position and costume (1.25%) has the lowest position in the three textbooks. The cultural theme related to Values (29.16%) is in the second position in this research. In conclusion, the little ‘c’ themes in Vision 2 are more than the others. The evidence from the statistical analysis shows that there is a significant difference among Vision series regarding little c themes with a chi-square index (35.945) and a significance level of 0.000.

Table 5

Cultural Themes in Vision Series

Textbooks		Big C	Little c	Total
Vision 1	N	136	72	208
	%	66.34	34.61	35.37
Vision 2	N	132	97	229
	%	57.20	42.35	38.94
Vision 3	N	80	71	151
	%	52.98	47.01	25.68
Total	N	348	240	588
	%	59.18	40.81	100
Pearson Chi-Square		5.942	Sig=.050	

Based on the percentages and types of culture in Table 5, the percentage of big ‘C’ cultural themes is found to be the highest (59.28%) among the three textbooks. Statistically speaking, there is also a significant difference between the three books in terms of big ‘C’ and little ‘c’ themes with a Chi-square index of 5.942 at the significance level of 0.050. Based on the analysis conducted, it is evident that the three EFL high school textbooks were prominently influenced by big ‘C’ cultural themes, as opposed to little ‘c’ themes. In other words, language learners can be more familiar with “geography, education, art/literature” than with “lifestyles, values, ideas, hobbies, and gesture/body language”.



### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In the EFL teaching context, cultural contents in the textbooks give vital information about different groups, norms, and values in order to raise multicultural awareness and promote intercultural communication and above all intercultural citizenship among the learners. According to Kramsch (1993), language contains culture which can impact the way of speakers' world perception and interpretation. Peterson and Coltrane (2003) added that language learner has the capacity to attain proficiency in the target language within the context of their associated cultural milieu. In fact, the content of EFL textbooks affects learners' perception and the development of their "intercultural communicative competence" in the educational system. That is why EFL textbooks ought to incorporate wide cultural content to empower learners to assess other cultures as well as their own.

This study investigated how the recent EFL textbook contributed to the development of students' intercultural communication. The researchers found that based on Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) cultural categories, source culture was highlighted over the other categories of culture in the 'pictures' and 'written texts' of the *Vision* series. Also, there was not any significant difference between the three textbooks in terms of using source, target, and international cultural categories. The present findings are consistent with the previous research that explores cultural elements in secondary education textbooks (e.g., Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Asadi, Kiany, Akbari, & Samar, 2016; Baghermousavi & Nabifar, 2016; Ghiyasiyan, Seraj & Bahreini, 2017; Gholami Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018; Khodabandeh & Mombini, 2018; Salehi & Amini, 2016; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015) who collectively criticized the latest revised generation of textbooks for neglecting the intercultural competence and intercultural communication. It can be concluded that these English textbooks are predominantly source culture-oriented textbooks that lack the initiative to promote students' intercultural- and target-culture communicative competencies which are the indicators of enhancing intercultural communication and cultural understanding. The reason might be the still-existing anti-western sensation that can still be witnessed after two revisions now. Investigating the Algerian English textbooks, Messekher (2014) had a similar result reporting the dominance of the local culture. The finding, however, is in sharp contrast with that in the textbooks in mainland China which focus on the culture of Britain as an inner circle country and pay little attention to the international (foreign) culture (Lee & Li, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). Ahmed and Narcy-Combes (2011) also concluded that the target culture in the Pakistani EFL textbooks is dominant over the local culture. Secondary school English textbooks in South Korea were also reported to have dominant representations of foreign cultures (Su, 2016). Other studies like Setyono and Widodo (2019) also revealed a fairly balanced inclusion of multicultural values in Indonesian high school EFL textbooks. The study also investigated the gender-related cultural contents of the textbooks. The results revealed that females were less visible than males both in texts and pictures. Furthermore, masculinity had more diverse representations, especially by having more occupational roles, than those of femininity as represented by the textbooks. This gender bias may come from the concept of male chauvinism which is traditionally rooted in Iranian society.

The result of investigating the distribution of dimensions of big 'C' and little 'c' culture themes demonstrated that there was a significant difference between cultural big 'C' and little 'c' themes among the three textbooks. The result here shows the dominance of the big 'C' culture over the little c which, as Lee (2009) and Wintergerst and McVeigh (2010) proposed, has a prominent role in the development of a culturally competent learner. Nevertheless, students who study English using these textbooks do not acquire the ability to communicate in everyday settings since big 'C' themes may not amply contribute to enhancing students' intercultural communicative competence and raising their critical cultural awareness to understand and communicate with people of other cultures and assess the cultural contents of other languages. The results also show that with the reduction of big 'C' elements from Book 1 to 3, little c elements reversely increase from Book 1 to 3. A similar pattern of results was obtained in Rodríguez and Espinar (2015) examining ELT textbooks in Spain. Liu (2013) also reported that little c themes were the dominant theme in Chinese EFL textbooks. However, there is no balanced attention to both types of content, as Xiao (2010) suggested, necessary to foster students' communicative competence. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), the primacy of little 'c' themes should be emphasized in both cultural learning and instructional materials. Wintergerst and McVeigh (2010) also believe that effective cross-cultural interaction requires learners to possess the capability to articulate information concerning their daily routines, lifestyles, and customs.



Tomalin & Stempleski (1993) believed that little 'c' themes should take priority in culture learning and in textbooks. Wintergerst & McVeigh (2010) also explain that learners need the ability to communicate about their daily lives, lifestyles, and customs to have more effective cross-cultural interaction. These high school textbooks did not provide students with the underlying essentials of intercultural communication and little 'c', daily life-related themes. This might be one of the reasons why learners who only studied these books are not able to communicate in the multicultural world. Based on the result of the research, there is more in-depth analysis needs to be conducted on EFL textbooks from different perspectives in order to develop English-speaking cultures in expanding countries (Kachru. 1985) such as Iran.

Among the big 'C' cultural contents extracted in the *Vision* series, geography, education, and art/literature are the most recurring topics, and politics and music have no trace in the textbooks. The reason why these two themes are not at all present in the books could be the unstated rule that these two issues are controversial in Iranian society. In terms of the number of cultural items, *Vision 1* is richer in big 'C' cultural themes, and *Vision 3* is the poorest. Among the little 'c' cultural contents, lifestyle and values are the most frequent and costume has the lowest frequency in the three textbooks. Regarding the number of cultural themes, little 'c' themes in *Vision 2* are more than the others. This, however, does not change the imbalanced view of the big 'C' and little 'c' cultural contents in the textbook series that leads to augmenting communicative competence. This study was delimited only to the written texts and pictures and the results could be otherwise and more generalizable by considering every aspect of the textbooks. Also, the process of data extraction was conducted by two researchers and it underwent double-checking; however, as with any other qualitative study, the coders' personal and professional experiences and preferences could have influenced the outcome and undermined the generalizability of the study. The theoretical frameworks adopted for this study can also be another limitation of the study that can affect the findings. Other frameworks to extract cultural elements or categories might have different effects on the present results.

As a whole, the present study has suggested the ground for syllabus designers and material developers both in the national and international arenas to be more critical of textbooks and learners' needs in the age of intercultural citizenship. To meet this end, some precautionary measures should be taken prior to developing the new textbooks, and major reforms are expected in the existing textbooks both at the level of policymakers and material developers to create materials that can bridge the gap between student's first language and the target/international language culture. This can pave the way to empower learners for effective intercultural communication and improved intercultural communicative competence in the expanding circle countries.

## REFERENCES

- Ahamdpour, S., & Kuhi, D. (2019). Attitudes towards the efficiency of English culture treatment at schools: A case of Iranian Kurdish EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(5), 562-570.
- Ahmed, F., & Narcy-Combes, F. M. (2011). An analysis of textbooks from a cultural point of view. *TESOL Journal*, 5, 21-37.
- Ajideh, P., & Panahi, M. (2016). An analysis of culture-related content in English textbooks for Iranian students entitled 'Prospect' and 'Vision' series. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 3(6), 87-93.
- Aliakbari, M. (2005). The place of culture in Iranian ELT textbooks at the high school level. *Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics (PAAL)*, 9(1), 163-179.
- Alptekin, C. (2002). Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 56(1), 57-64.
- Anjaneyulu, T. (2014). A critical analysis of the English language textbooks in Andhra Pradesh, India. *ELT Research Journal*, 3(4), 181-200.
- Asadi, M., Kiany, G. R., Akbari, R., & Samar, R. G. (2016). Program evaluation of the New English textbook (Prospect 1) in the Iranian Ministry of Education. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 6(2), 291-301.
- Ashraf, H., Kafi, Z., & Motallebzadeh, K. (2013). On the relationship between English Textbooks and Iranian EFL learners' acculturation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(9), 1658-1666. Retrieved from <http://www.ijllalw.org/finalversion423.pdf>



- Ashrafi, S. & Ajideh, P. (2018). Exploring culture-related content in English textbooks: A closer look at advanced series of Iran Language Institute. *The Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances*, 6(1), 91-109.
- Baghermousavi, M. S., & Nabifar, N. (2016). Cultural manifestation in Iranian second grade junior high school textbook Prospect 2: A semiotic analysis study. *Enjoy Teaching Journal*, 4, 1-11.
- Bateman, B., & Mattos, M. (2006). An analysis of the cultural content of six Portuguese textbooks. *Portuguese Language Journal*, 1(1), 49-71.
- Battista, G. (1984). *Language and culture: Strategies for teaching language in the classroom*. New York: State University of New York at Stony Brook.
- Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethno-relativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience* (pp. 109-135). Pennsylvania: Intercultural Press.
- Birjandi, P., & Alizadeh, I. (2013). Manifestation of critical thinking skills in the English textbooks employed by language institutes in Iran. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 2(1), 27-38.
- Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*. New York: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). New York: Multilingual Matters.
- Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1 (1), 1-47.
- Celce-Murcia M (2007). Rethinking the role of communicative competence in language teaching. In E. Alcon Soler & M. Pilar Safont Jorda (Eds.), *Intercultural Language Use and Language Learning* (pp. 41-57). The Netherlands: Springer.
- Celce-Murcia, M., & Olshtain, E. (2000). *Discourse and context in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, B. B. (2004). A survey on cultural learning and its variables analysis. *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 12(3), 21-24.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1999). *Cultural mirrors: Materials and methods in the EFL classroom*. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 196-219). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corbett, J. (2003). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching. Languages for intercultural communication and education*. New York: Multilingual matters.
- Dehbozorgi, M., Amalsaleh, E., & Kafipour, R. (2014). Exploring cultural content of three prominent EFL textbooks in Iran: A case study of American English Files, Top Notch, and Four Corners). *Acta Didactica Napocensia*, 7(1), 69-81.
- Derakhshan, A. (2024). Should textbook images be merely decorative?: Cultural representations in the Iranian EFL national textbook from the semiotic approach perspective. *Language Teaching Research*, 28(1), 79-113.
- Efron, K. A. (2020). Representations of multiculturalism in Japanese elementary EFL textbooks: A critical analysis. *Intercultural Communication Education*, 3(1), 22-43.
- Faris, I. N. I. (2014). Cultural content analysis of an English textbook for senior high school grade three in Cianjur, West Java. *Journal of English and Education*, 2(2), 14-25.
- Ghiyasiyan, M., Seraj, F., & Bahreini, M. (2017). A content analysis of the ninth-grade English textbook according to Iranian-Islamic culture and identity. *Journal of Curriculum Studies (JCS)*, 11(43), 125-144.
- Gholami Pasand, P., & Ghasemi, A. A. (2018). An intercultural analysis of English language textbooks in Iran: The case of English Prospect Series. *Apples: Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 12(1), 55-70.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hallett, R. W. (2021). An examination of EFL textbooks in Lithuania. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 16(3), 210-226.
- Hamers, J. & Blanc, M., (1989). *Bilinguality and bilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hartman, P. L., & Judd, E. L. (1978). Sexism and TESOL materials. *TESOL Quarterly*, 12 (4), 383-393.
- Hinkel, E. (2001). Building awareness and practical skills to facilitate cross-cultural communication. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 443-358). Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage Learning.
- Ho, S. T. K. (2009). Addressing culture in EFL classroom: The challenge of shifting from a traditional to an intercultural stance. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 6(1), 63-76.



- Hymes, D. H. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth: Penguin book.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literature* (pp. 241-270). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khajavi, Y. & Abbasian, R. (2011). English language teaching, national identity and globalization in Iran: The case of public schools. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1 (10), 181-186.
- Khodabandeh, F., & Mombini, R. (2018). Iranian EFL teachers' and students' perceptions towards the first-grade high school English textbook (Vision1). *Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice*, 11(22), 141-167.
- Kim, D. (2020). Learning language, learning culture: Teaching language to the whole student. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(3), 519-541.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C., & Zhu, H. (2020). Translating culture in global times: An introduction. *Applied Linguistics*, 41(1), 1-9.
- Lee, K. Y. (2009). Treating culture: What 11 high school EFL conversation textbooks in South Korea do. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 8(1), 76-96.
- Lee, J. F. K. & Li, X. (2020). Cultural representation in English language textbooks: A comparison of textbooks used in mainland China and Hong Kong. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 28(4), 605-623. DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2019.1681495
- Lessard-Clouston, M. (1997). Towards an understanding of culture in L2/FL education. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3(5), 1-12.
- Liu, S. (2013). Students' attitudes toward culture learning in the English classroom: A case study of non-English major students in a Chinese University. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 1(3), 28–42. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v1i3.3508>
- Majdzadeh, M. (2002). *Disconnection between language and culture: A case study of Iranian English textbooks*. Unpublished MA thesis, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia.
- McConachy, T., & Hata, K. (2013). Addressing textbook representations of pragmatics and culture. *ELT Journal*, 67(3), 294–301.
- McGrath, I. (2002). *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Messekher, H. (2014). Cultural representations in Algerian English textbooks. In S. Garton, & K. Graves (Eds.), *International Perspectives on Materials in ELT* (pp. 69-86). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023315\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137023315_5)
- Orsini-Jones, M., & Lee, F. (2018). *Intercultural communicative competence for global citizenship: Identifying cyber pragmatic rules of engagement in telecollaboration*. The Netherlands: Springer.
- Peterson, E. & Coltrane, B. (2003). Culture in second language teaching. *CAL Digest*, 3(9), 1-6
- Piątkowska, K. (2015). From cultural knowledge to intercultural communicative competence: Changing perspectives on the role of culture in foreign language teaching. *Intercultural Education*, 26(5), 397-408.
- Rajabi, S., & Ketabi, S. (2012). Aspects of cultural elements in prominent English textbooks for EFL Setting. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 2(4), 705-712.
- Rashidi, N., & Najafi, R. (2010). The representation of culture in Iran Language Institute advanced level textbooks. *JLTR* 1(5), 624-631.
- Riasati, M. J., & Zare, P. (2010). Textbook evaluation: EFL teachers' perspectives on New Interchange series. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 1(8), 54–60.
- Riazi, A. M. (2016). *The Routledge encyclopedia of research methods in applied linguistics*. New York: Routledge.
- Rodríguez, A. R. R., & Espinar, A. A. (2015). General and specific culture learning in EFL textbooks aimed at adult learners in Spain. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 50, 5–25.
- Rokhsari, S. (2023). Culture in English language teaching: A comprehensive review of current research. *Journal of Applied Linguistics Studies*, 2(2), 82-91.
- Roohani, A., & Molana, E. (2013). An investigation into cultural representation in interchange textbooks. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 2(2), 113-136.
- Sadeghi, K., & Sepahi, Z. (2018). Cultural content of three EFL textbooks: Teachers' and learners' cultural preferences and cultural themes of textbooks. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 13(3), 222-245.
- Salehi, H., & Amini, M. (2016). Critical analysis of a new English textbook used in Iranian junior high schools. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 3(3), 42-54.





- Setyono, B. & Widodo, H. P. (2019). The representation of multicultural values in the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture-Endorsed EFL textbook: A critical discourse analysis. *Intercultural Education*, 30(4), 383-397. DOI: 10.1080/14675986.2019.1548102
- Shaules, J. (2007). *Deep culture: The hidden challenges of global living*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Sharif, M., & Yarmohammadi L. (2013). Culture, national identity, and globalization between the lines of reading comprehension texts in Iran. *Elixir International Journal of Linguistics and Translation*, 56, 13452-13455
- Su, Y. C. (2016). The international status of English for intercultural understanding in Taiwan's high school EFL textbooks. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 36(3), 390-408. doi:10.1080/02188791.2014.959469.
- Tajeddin, Z., & Teimournezhad, S. (2015). Exploring the hidden agenda in the representation of culture in international and localized ELT textbooks. *The Language Learning Journal*, 43(2), 180-193.
- Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural awareness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tomlinson, B. (2011). *Materials development in language teaching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Victor, M. (1999). Learning English in Gabon: The question of cultural content. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 12(1), 23-30.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1990). *Aspects of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wintergerst, A. C., & McVeigh, J. (2010). *Tips for teaching culture: A practical approach to intercultural communication*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman.
- Xiang, R., & Yenika-Agbaw, V. (2021). EFL textbooks, culture and power: a critical content analysis of EFL textbooks for ethnic Mongols in China. *Journal of multilingual and multicultural development*, 42(4), 327-341.
- Xiao, J. (2010). *Cultural contents of an in-use EFL Textbook and English major students' attitudes and perceptions towards culture learning at Jiangxi University of Science and Technology, China* (Unpublished M.A. Thesis). Prince of Songkla University, China.
- Yamada, M. (2006). *The representation of race and ethnic relations in Japanese junior high school English language textbooks from 1987 to 2002*. Michigan: Western Michigan University.
- Yamada, M. (2010). English as a multicultural language: implications from a study of Japan's junior high schools' English language textbooks. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 31(5), 491-506.
- Yarmohammadi, L. (2002). The evaluation of pre-university textbooks. *The Newsletter of the Iranian Academy of Science*, 18, 70-87.
- Zarei, G. R., & Khalessi, M. (2011). Cultural load in English language textbooks: An analysis of interchange series. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 294-301.
- Zhang, H., Li, X. & Chang, W. (2022). Representation of cultures in national English textbooks in China: A synchronic content analysis. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2022.2099406
- Zohrabi, M., Sabouri, H., & Behroozian, R. (2012). An assessment of strengths and weaknesses of Iranian first-year high school English coursebook using evaluation checklist. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2), 89-99.