

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE VALUE OF MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS REPRESENTED IN AN EFL TEXTBOOK



 Ali Alsaawi

Department of English, College of Humanities & Sciences in Alghat,
Majmaah University, KSA.
Email: a.alsaawi@mu.edu.sa



ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 15 March 2021

Revised: 11 June 2021

Accepted: 2 August 2021

Published: 9 September 2021

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis

EFL textbooks

Linguistic diversity

Multicultural awareness.

Learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in contexts with limited multinational and transcultural backgrounds, such as Saudi Arabia, should be able to communicate with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students' awareness should be enriched with an understanding of the diversity among people around the world. EFL textbooks are one of the platforms for raising students' awareness of cultural and linguistic differences. This study aimed to explore the cultural content of an EFL textbook taught at an international primary school in Saudi Arabia via the adoption of critical discourse analysis as a methodological approach. It focused on the multicultural values represented in the EFL textbook geared toward teaching senior primary school students. The study identified a number of values, including fostering positive perspectives concerning old tribes and people, appreciating the lives of other people, respecting the hard efforts made by some nations and understanding different cultural values in different parts of the world. There is found a lack of consideration of the cultural values of some countries in Africa, the Middle East and the Far East. Therefore, this study implicates stakeholders in Saudi Arabia to demand their cultural values be depicted in teaching and educational material.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is among the very few studies examining the cultural values in an EFL textbook taught in Saudi Arabia. It highlights the imbalance in the way textbooks raise awareness of Western cultural values rather than Eastern ones.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is increasingly becoming an international language that is not exclusively confined only to the inner circle countries (i.e., North America, the United Kingdom and Australia). Many outer countries around the world include English in their educational systems as a matter of necessity. This need, according to Jenkins (2006) arises from the claim that learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are expected to communicate with non-native speakers of English more than with native speakers of English. Therefore, there is an urgent need for multiculturalism to be included in EFL textbooks. The study of EFL textbooks has mainly focused on cultural aspects related to the use of these textbooks in their context. This focus reflects awareness among researchers of the importance of acknowledging multicultural backgrounds in EFL textbooks (see (Dinh & Sharifian, 2017; McConachy, 2018; Su, 2016; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015; Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Wu & Pei, 2018)). The

stakeholders in such contexts try to provide suitable EFL textbooks for their students. This includes consideration of the cultural background of the students. Thus, the role of intercultural communication is strongly endorsed.

Many studies have been conducted regarding the representation of multicultural backgrounds in EFL contexts, for example in Pakistan, China, South Korea and Taiwan. However, very few studies have addressed this aspect in the Gulf region, specifically Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study attempted to explore the representation of multicultural values in an EFL textbook taught in a Saudi Arabian international school. This study was guided by whether or not the multicultural values represented in the EFL textbooks adopted by Saudi international schools address the multicultural backgrounds of the students. Moreover, it examined whether the EFL textbooks adopted by Saudi international schools support the development of the students' intercultural awareness.

1.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Social issues such as ideology, cultural values and social inequality are among the areas on which critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses and analyzes the linguistic characteristics of discourse in relation to social structure and cognition. It is a theoretical framework that investigates various aspects of discourse in different disciplines such as the relationship between language and society. Languages play an important role in constructing social identities and ideologies (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). To analyze these social issues, some models of CDA should be considered. One of the prominent models is that of Fairclough (1995), whose work advances the development of CDA. He focuses on the analysis of social issues such as sociocultural change and discursive change. Another notable model is that of Van Dijk (1995), which focuses on the socio-cognitive approach that is mostly used in the triangular interdisciplinary frame. In the Van Dijk model, influence of discourse is one of the cognitive processes that operate in the human brains (Van Dijk, 2001). This study employed CDA in its analysis of an EFL textbook by adopting Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Education in Saudi Arabia

Since the inclusion of English in the Saudi education system in 1937, textbooks and curricula have gone through extensive changes (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). These changes have been triggered by the aim of attaining an appropriate curriculum that addresses students' background. The teaching approaches and materials in public and private schools in Saudi Arabia are controlled by the Ministry of Education (MoE), which has a specialized team dedicated to approving curricula and textbooks. However, international schools have greater flexibility in these matters due to the multicultural background of their students. Therefore, international schools only use the MoE approved textbooks to teach Arabic and Islamic subjects. The materials for all other subjects are sourced from global educational publishers, such as McGraw-Hill Education, Pearson Education, Oxford University Press and Macmillan Learning. These publishers print Middle East editions. International schools believe that by using such textbooks, they can deliver appropriate educational content as such materials address international students.

The use of textbooks, guided by teachers, is a crucial element in ensuring efficient teaching and learning. The textbooks used by international schools are expected to meet the Saudi Arabian standard in terms of norms and values, i.e., avoiding radicalism, religious sentiments, gender stereotyping and violence, inter alia. In Saudi Arabia, the EFL textbooks assigned for use in public and private schools have been sanctioned as they are authorized by the MoE. However, the EFL textbooks used by international schools need to be analyzed as they are sourced from international educational publishers, which focus on promoting their educational publications to broad audiences. For this reason, they are supposed to address and meet broad, global standards of values and norms.

2.2. Multicultural Values in EFL Textbooks

It is commonly assumed that language and culture are inseparable. Therefore, learners of foreign languages should be aware of the target language culture with a view to achieving efficient cultural communication (Liu, 2017). With the rise of English as an international language, communicative competence is no longer enough. Intercultural communicative competence is increasingly becoming an additional target for EFL learners and teachers (Isnaini, Setyono, & Ariyanto, 2019) and it is vital for EFL learners to be exposed to cultural knowledge and practice. Awareness of cultural variation is a crucial part of people's lives as they are expected to respect cultural differences at all levels. EFL learners will be exposed to these differences and therefore their textbooks should address multicultural values as part of treating English as a lingua franca (Baker, 2012). According to Setyono and Widodo (2019) multicultural values are "defined as ones that recognize the cultures of people from different sociocultural and geographic backgrounds." EFL textbooks encompass texts that are meant to teach both language and variant cultural values. However, some of these texts are influenced by the authors' intention to address the ideologies of the official curriculum (Awyed-Bishara, 2015; Van Dijk, 2001).

2.3 CDA and its Application in textbooks

There are several studies that have explored cultural representations in textbooks. These studies have mainly compared the cultural representation between 'inner circle' and 'outer circle' countries. Inner circle countries are the mother lands of English language speakers where English is considered as the first language while the outer circle countries are the international world where English is considered the second or foreign language. Some of these studies are that of Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2011), Ahmed and Narcy-Combes (2011), Yuen (2011), Su (2016), Song (2013), Weninger and Kiss (2013), Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015). Setyono and Widodo (2019) particularly explored this phenomenon in the light of Fairclough's CDA. They showed how Fairclough used CDA as the best methodological tool to examine the representation of texts and the construction of social realities. In addition, it was also explained how CDA could be used to analyze the ideological systems embedded in texts and social practices. Therefore, this study aims to apply Fairclough's CDA model to examine this phenomenon from the perspective of multicultural values represented in EFL textbooks.

2.4. Language and Culture

Drawing on a human conception that views culture as a cognitive system, language is deeply affected by cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2011). The theoretical framework developed by Sharifian (2011) seeks to examine cultural cognition that represents cultural knowledge, and focuses on the relationship between language and culture. This is considered important due to the "constant negotiation and renegotiation across generations, time and space and through interaction and contact between members of one group with those from others (Dinh & Sharifian, 2017).

The cultural conceptualization, according to Dinh and Sharifian (2017), refers to three cultural groups namely, the cultural schema, the cultural category and the cultural metaphor. The cultural schema is a "conceptual structure heterogeneously shared by members of a cultural group" (Sharifian, 2011). Its interpretation depends on our experience of objects and phenomena, such as images, emotions and events. Some of these experiences are attached to certain events and objects that vary between groups and individuals and therefore their interpretation may also vary. The cultural category, in addition, is a "cognitive category that has a cultural bias" (Sharifian, 2011). Categorizing experiences and events is a cultural cognitive process. The third cultural group is the cultural metaphor, which refers to "conceptual metaphors that have a root in cultural system such as ethnomedical traditions, religion and the like" (Sharifian, 2011). For instance, emotions are derived from our hearts, which are linked to ethnomedical findings (Yu, 2008). These cultural categories provide a theoretical framework that assists in analyzing the features of language and culture.

2.5. Previous Studies

Many previous studies related to cultural values in EFL textbooks have revealed that the cultures of English-speaking people (e.g., United States and UK) tend to be represented in EFL texts over and above the cultures of the non-English speaking people in the contexts where these EFL textbooks are taught. This has a significant impact on the learners of EFL as their own cultures are underrepresented. For instance, a study conducted by [Ahmed and Narcy-Combes \(2011\)](#) examined the representation of Pakistani culture in EFL textbooks. They found that their home culture was underrepresented compared to the culture of the target language people. This result was in line with other studies conducted in other contexts (see [\(Shin et al., 2011; Song, 2013; Su, 2016\)](#)).

[Shin et al. \(2011\)](#) examined the cultural perspectives represented in an international series of English language teaching (ELT) textbooks. They found that although different cultural aspects were represented in the text book, the local culture was underrepresented compared to the cultures of English-speaking people. In addition, a study conducted by [Awayed-Bishara \(2015\)](#) examined the cultural representation of Palestinians in EFL textbooks. The study found that the Palestinian culture was “marginalized”. [Weninger and Kiss \(2013\)](#) undertook an analysis of Hungarian EFL textbooks and revealed that there were representations of characters, topics and voices from around the world, which indicated the intention of the Hungarian authors to familiarize the learners with various cultures.

Moreover, [Kim and Paek \(2015\)](#) conducted a study in South Korea that examined an EFL textbook for middle school students supporting multicultural values. They found that although there were some cultural representations, these were underdiscussed. In the same vein, [Gómez Rodríguez \(2015\)](#) examined cultural representation in an EFL textbook at one of Colombia’s universities and found that multicultural values were not adequately represented.

The extant studies discussed above indicate that though home/local cultures of people outside the English-speaking countries are depicted in EFL textbooks, these representations of the home/local cultures were limited. This was potentially due to the fact that the authors of EFL textbooks tend to be native speakers of English. Moreover, some of the studies revealed that cultural representations remained underexplored in a few EFL textbooks. This study, therefore, attempted to fill the gap in previous works by providing a critical evaluation of an international EFL textbook adopted in Saudi Arabia. The evaluation is based on the multicultural content represented in the textbook. It aimed to assess how the textbook content enhanced multicultural awareness among learners.

3. METHODOLOGY

By adopting CDA as a methodological approach, this study aimed to examine the multicultural values represented in an international English textbook adopted by one of the international primary schools in Saudi Arabia. The field of applied linguistics was the first to employ CDA, especially in relation to language and social structure. It provided “a framework and a means of exploring the imbrications between language and social-institutional practices” ([Fairclough, 2013](#)). CDA entails:

[...] the study of text and talk, emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and in general from a socio-politically conscious and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communications. ([Van Dijk, 1995](#))

Considering the context of language use being one of the main aims of CDA, it also reflects the intentions of language users ([Halliday, 1978](#)). CDA also is utilized in the representation of texts to construct social realities that are related to ideologies ([Widodo, 2018](#)). These ideologies can be reshaped by texts and social practices, which may eventually affect our perspectives concerning the values of a society. One of the analytical approaches in CDA is systematic functional linguistics ([Halliday \(1978\)](#)). This approach is concerned with the linguistic and visual choices in texts ([Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006](#)).

This study aimed to analyze the text of an ELT textbook entitled “Family and Friends -5,” published by Oxford University Press. This textbook, authored by Tamzin Thompson, an ELT expert who has authored many ELT textbooks, addresses international primary schools (Thompson, 2018). One of the reasons of adopting this text book by stakeholders of a few Saudi international schools is that this textbook has four sections, each on a separate theme having its own focus. The themes are “performing arts,” “the environment,” “health and fitness” and “history,” respectively. The text book covers as well the basic requirements for young learners such as building new words and vocabulary and improving grammar and communicative skills through reading, writing, listening and speaking activities. The whole textbook tends to discuss current issues that are suitable for young EFL learners. The choice of this textbook was based on its popularity in Saudi Arabia, where it has been adopted by most of the international schools. It has been regarded as a suitable textbook for analysis since the readership is quite diverse because these international schools in Saudi Arabia have both national and international students.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

This section provides an analysis of the multicultural values depicted in the textbook adopted with a view to enhancing the students’ awareness of intercultural communication. To do so, Fairclough (1995) three-dimensional model was employed to analyze the collected data where he suggested three stages of CDA, namely, text description, relationship between text and interaction and relationship between interaction and social context. Fairclough model was applied in this study where “discourse was analyzed and described linguistically to figure out the discursive strategies, vocabularies, and discourse structures which then interpreted and explained with relation to the social, societal and cultural background context to find out underlying agenda of discourse” (Al Kayed, Khalaf, & Akram, 2020).

This paper discusses the intention of the author to include multicultural values in the textbook given that the aim of the publisher was to serve the multinational and multicultural learners. The focus is on the verbal texts and materials represented in the textbook, as well as discussing and analyzing the visual representations, which include photographs, pictures and other visuals in the textbook. The verbal texts and visuals are clearly intended to reinforce students’ awareness of multiculturalism and multinationalism. However, an important argument made by Brown and Habegger-Conti (2017) states that:

[...] the English subject curriculum does not address the notion of stereotypes or mention concepts like “otherization” and essentialism, and in fact seems to encourage them with competence aims from the fourth to tenth grade asking students to compare “English speaking cultures” with “Norwegian culture” for the purpose of reflecting on one’s own culture, attitudes and beliefs. The problem with goals such as this is not in reflection, but in the culturally constructed ways that people are taught to imagine the Self as “normal” or “superior” and the Other as “alien”.

This is a crucial clarification because it sheds light on the sensitive issue of what is considered “normal” and “superior” with regard to culture. Such inequality and conflicts are to be discarded and confronted with the merits of multiculturalism. Thus, EFL learners’ acceptance of different cultural entities and identities are reinforced.

4.1. Representation of Verbal Texts and Materials

This section cites multicultural and multinational values represented in the textbook sampled for the study. Though authors of textbooks present verbal texts and materials with visuals, Widodo (2018) analyzed that verbal texts can refer to both spoken and written texts. Generally speaking, verbal texts are meant to support the development of multiculturalism and promote understanding and respect for different cultures (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017). Hence the analysis of the textbook in this study is related predominantly to written texts. To analyze the representation of multicultural values in the textbook, some reports and stories were examined. Due to the spatial constraints, citations from the text book are limited to only the relevant ones:

Text 1: Rio Carnival (p. 34)

“The Rio Carnival is the most famous carnival in the world. It lasts for four days. The two biggest performances in the Rio Carnival are on Carnival Sunday and Monday, when the best samba schools in the city have a competition. Samba schools are dance groups and every samba school has its own dancers and musicians. The samba school competition is a fantastic show. Everyone cheers when they see the amazing costumes and floats and the brilliant dancers. The music is great too. Everyone wants to dance when they hear samba music.”

This is one of the more culturally interesting topics in the textbook, one that exposes students to different cultural values related to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This provides a good opportunity for young students to enrich their cultural background. The extract above is part of a longer report talking about a traditional carnival that includes samba schools presenting their own dancers and musicians. In addition, the variety of costumes and floats are something worth mentioning in the carnival. Such a topic could enhance students’ understanding of multicultural and national values. By providing a variety of different examples, such as in Text 1 above, students’ awareness and appreciation of such traditions and habits can be reinforced (Yuen, 2011).

Text 2: Give your rubbish a new home (p. 52)

“Recycling is a great idea, but before you throw your rubbish into a recycling bin, stop and think. There are lots of other things you can do with your rubbish. Your rubbish is useful to other people. Find a new home for your old things and help your town.”

Text 2 above is an important topic for young students. Recycling is crucial to preserve our planet and introducing this topic to such young students could help raise their awareness of this international practice. This is a good example to show students that there are some universal habits and practices around the globe. The text above leads into detailing how recycling can help the poor and support vulnerable societies. Students should learn that differences and similarities are part of people’s lives and they should accept people as they are.

Text 3: The lost city (p. 102)

“The Inca people lived in the Andes mountains in South America over 500 years ago. The Inca used stone to build wonderful buildings with slanted doorways, windows and roofs. Most Inca cities did not have walls around them, but they were very safe. There were large stone fortresses near each city. When there was a danger, the people could hide in the fortresses. The most famous Inca city is Machu Picchu. Machu Picchu is high in the Andes mountains in Peru.”

This is informative knowledge triggered through an English language textbook for students from another continent. This text is an example which is meant to raise students’ awareness of the old history of some ancient tribes, in this case the Inca people, who used to live long ago in the Andes mountains in South America (nowadays Peru). Teachers can take the opportunity to elaborate on the life of the Inca people and explain how they suffered to build their own cities. Indeed, the use of a few sentiment verbs in the text above provoked sympathy towards these ancient people (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Text 4: Famous people in the news (p. 120)

“Celebrities are always in our newspapers and magazines. They are not always happy when stories about them are reported in the news. But I believe that the public should know about famous people’s lives. Celebrities want to be famous. They should be pleased when their photos are printed in newspapers or magazines. People spend a lot of money on tickets to watch concerts, films and sport events. On the other hand, reporters and photographers sometimes make life difficult for famous people.”

It is vital to teach young students and children that fame should not be a target. They may think that famous people and celebrities are always happy and rich. However, the text above teaches students that popularity has its own price. Celebrities’ private lives are subject to rumors and false accusations. Their photographs are everywhere, which makes it hard for them to protect their own privacy. This could lead us to the controversial issue of what

constitutes public interest vs. the right to privacy. By learning about this, students can appreciate their own simple lives and that nothing in life comes without pain and hard work. This is culturally essential for students to understand. Employing CDA and Fairclough’s socio-cultural model indeed provided a holistic understanding with regard to social and cultural structures.

4.2. Representation of Visuals in the Textbook

This section presents selected visuals (portrayals and photographs) representing multicultural and multinational values. Visuals such as images and photographs are also a kind of discourse that contribute significantly to language learning (Erfani, 2012). Indeed, EFL learners are culturally engaged and motivated through the use of visuals in EFL textbooks. Therefore, it is argued that “images and texts should be harnessed more explicitly to develop a critical and reflexive understanding of culture, self, and other” (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Moreover, it is commonly accepted that “images, rather than being viewed simply as illustrations of a verbal text, carry their own meaning and can, in and of themselves, be read” (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017). For reasons of space, only some of the relevant visual discourses have been included here for in-depth analysis.

1 Listen and read. What is Ben's hobby? 07

Ben has had woodwork lessons since he was eight. He goes to lessons every Tuesday and Thursday after school. He's very good at woodwork now. He's worked on this wooden table for two weeks. He's decided to give it to his mum as a present.



Figure-1. Representation of visual multicultural values.

Source: Thompson (2018).

Looking at the extract from the textbook in Figure 1, we can clearly understand that the portrayal was culturally intended for Western students (including English-speaking people). Visually speaking, it represents a visual of Western students in their school uniforms, which is a useful way to foster multicultural awareness. It is believed that this is an important and useful exposure for students in Saudi Arabia who could increase their awareness of aspects of multiculturalism. In terms of clothing, the figure in the textbook reveals some of the visuals dedicated to raising students’ awareness about different types of outfits; however, the figure, like many others, represents Western outfits and does not include any related to the culture of Saudi Arabia.

1 Listen and read. 55



Figure-2. Representation of visual multicultural values.

Source: Thompson (2018).

There is no representation of visuals related to students in Saudi Arabia until page 62, where two students are portrayed talking about gorillas (see Figure 2). The skin color (brown) and name (Zaid) of a student can be related to the context where the textbook is taught.



Figure-3. Representation of visual multicultural values.

Source: Thompson (2018).

Furthermore, the global map shown in Figure 3 would visually raise the students' awareness of multinational values. Having the map with some countries' names displayed could trigger and stimulate further discussions about the countries' names. Such discussions encourage teachers to elaborate and expand on aspects of multinational and multicultural values. According to Fairclough (2013), "Social practices 'mediate' the relationship between general and abstract social structures and particular and concrete social events; social fields, institutions and organizations are constituted as networks of social practices". To conclude, Brown and Habegger-Conti (2017) argue that:

[...] one of the difficulties in teaching culture and/or interculturalism is not how we get to know, understand and respect others, but how well we know ourselves. Research in the area of visual literacy argues that interpretation depends upon the image producer and the reader engaging in a culturally and socially bound agreement.

5. DISCUSSION

CDA provides a proper space of social analysis through language studies and their social aspects (Fairclough, 2013). In the light of Fairclough (1995), this study explored the pictorial and verbal representation of multicultural values in an EFL textbook, prescribed in an international primary school in Saudi Arabia. Both visuals and texts attempted to make connections between the producer/writer and the recipient/reader. With regard to the representation of verbal texts and materials or visuals in the textbook related to the context of this study, there was no such representation that could be considered. However, on page 62, there was a short conversation between two students of color, one of whom had an Arabic name (Zaid). This was the only example in the entire textbook that could be considered a cultural representation of Saudi Arabia. The textbook under consideration in this study is an international/global textbook that targets multicultural and multinational students. It is expected in a multicultural context that as many nationalities and cultures as possible should be represented in a textbook. On the contrary, this textbook mainly represented the cultures of Western people, and while this was needed, especially for international students in the Middle East, Africa and the Far East, the lack of any representation of their own cultural values affected students' engagement.

The results of this study are in line with a study by Setyono and Widodo (2019) which revealed that local culture should be embedded in EFL textbooks. This study is also in agreement with the argument raised by Xiong and Qian (2012) who insisted on the need "for a multicultural and cosmopolitan perspective on curriculum development marked by an intercultural understanding of both the global and the local." Indeed, such imbalance in

the representation of international and local cultural values in EFL textbooks should be avoided. There are some examples where local culture is dominant compared to the international culture. For instance, Shin et al. (2011) found that “inner circle cultural content still dominates most of the textbooks. Furthermore, cultural presentation still largely remains at the traditional knowledge-oriented level and does not engage learners in deep levels of reflection.” This is another example from a different perspective that shows how local culture should be included together with international culture.

Stakeholders are seen as valuable customers for publishers, and therefore they should demand their cultural values are given significance as this could enrich the multicultural values already represented in the textbook. If this is not possible, stakeholders are advised to prepare and disseminate their own international textbooks dedicated specifically to international schools and students.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored the representation of multicultural and multinational values in the textbook “Family and Friends 5,” published by Oxford University Press, and allocated to EFL students at an international primary school in Saudi Arabia. From the perspective of CDA as a methodological approach, the findings revealed some values identified in the textbook, including generating positive perceptions concerning old tribes and people, appreciating the lives of other people, respecting the great efforts of some nations and understanding different cultural values from different parts of the world. In addition, the study identified some shared values among people in the world, such as recycling as an environmental measure. These multicultural and multinational values are represented in the EFL textbook with the aim of raising students’ awareness of such values. Although the author tried to include as many cultural values as possible, the cultural values of some countries in Africa, the Middle East and the Far East are not represented. Stakeholders in Saudi Arabia are strongly encouraged to demand their cultural values are depicted. In doing so, they can enrich their local and international students’ awareness of the cultural values in Saudi Arabia, which is crucial for residents of the country.

Funding: This research is supported and funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research at Majmaah University in Saudi Arabia (Project Number: R-2021-104).

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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