

Contextualization and Textbook Selection in An EFL Environment: A Pedagogical Perspective

Montasser Mohamed Abdelwahab Mahmoud*

Assistant Professor at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, Dammam, K.S.A

*Corresponding author: Montasser Mohamed Abdelwahab Mahmoud, Assistant Professor at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, Dammam, K.S.A. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9387-2785>; Email: dr.mmam73@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of contextualization in the choice of EFL textbooks, clarifying how it can foster learner engagement, linguistic authenticity, and cultural understanding. Educators can design more meaningful and effective language learning experiences that connect with the varied interests and backgrounds of EFL learners by giving contextual relevance top priority when choosing textbooks. For this reason, this paper aims at raising awareness towards integrating English culture into EFL textbooks. The paper tries to highlight how it appears possible that when educators and learners consider the nature of culture and genuinely contrast or compare the cultural elements that are probably shared by the target and native cultures, students will be able to learn about the target culture. The inference is that students in their native countries acquire English skills, so they can converse with foreign guests about their native principles and utilize those skills in their future careers. Additionally, they are supposed to go to English-speaking nations and share their traditions and customs; this should be easy for them to accomplish because they are likely to have prior understanding of their local culture in English. The paper argues that when students get more awareness of their own culture, they can improve their ability to converse about it in English as a result. Based on this recommendation, the current paper suggests employing a content-based approach to English language instruction and cultural awareness by implementing a local culture-based program that intentionally integrates the students' own culture into the EFL curriculum.

Keywords: Contextualization, EFL environment, EFL Textbook Selection, Pedagogical perspective, Local Culture, Target Culture.

Introduction

In the field of EFL instruction, contextualization is fundamental and affects how well language learning exercises work. It entails placing language content in pertinent historical, sociocultural, and situational settings to improve learners' comprehension, engagement, and retention [1]. Contextualization is an important factor to take into account when choosing EFL textbooks since it dictates how well instructional materials match the communicative demands, language proficiency, and cultural backgrounds of learners [2]. Language acquisition and education are just two areas of society that have been greatly influenced by students' local cultures [3]. A subject of great interest and scientific investigation is the impact of students' local culture on the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) skills. Examining the historical background, linguistic influences, and pedagogical approaches of students' local culture, this paper aims to investigate how these factors affect the learning and growth of EFL abilities. Given that students already have some prior knowledge of their own culture, this suggests that local culture could be used to help students improve their language skills. Thus, it is possible to improve both their English language skills and general attitudes toward learning English as a foreign language. It is common knowledge that one of the most crucial pillars in the development and creation of the English language textbooks for foreign learners is culturally relevant content. The setting in which they are

taught ought to align with the needs and interests of the students. This idea is now the moniker of a fresh approach to language instruction, and it is usually referred to as "contextualization" [4]. Therefore, this paper is an endeavor to provide an extensive analysis and debate of the theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and ideological concerns associated with teaching culture to non-native speakers since English nowadays is widely spoken by millions of people in a multitude of forms, variants, and varieties.

Literature Review

1. Students' local culture 's influence on EFL skills development

As the English language has become more widely used as a global language in the past thirty years, many regional or native variations of the language have come into being. In addition, their variations in regards to how the English language is being used, users of such tongues have multiplied and their impact has increased as time passes. They have also carried their distinct histories, cultural identities, perspectives, and habits to the field of English language pedagogy. In a similar vein, concerns about native English speakers decreasing their sovereignty and influence over the language as a whole and the English language eventually separating itself from the cultures of its first language users have come to pass [5].

Although it is sometimes seen as invading cultural identities in different parts of the world, the use of the English language as a medium and tool for globalization has greatly aided in its extensive distribution. No matter how much culture differs, this phenomenon, as described by Smith (2018) [6], has implications for the preservation of cultural legacy. It is most noticeable in situations where English and native languages collide. Students' local culture 's influence on EFL skills development can be observed through various linguistic and cultural phenomena. For instance, Arabic-speaking learners of English often bring unique perspectives, vocabulary, and linguistic structures shaped by their cultural and religious background into their language learning process [7]. Moreover, Islamic culture's emphasis on linguistic precision, as reflected in the classical Arabic language's grammatical rules and rhetoric, can impact learners' attention to detail and accuracy in EFL contexts [8]. In the Arab world, there is a noticeable English-Arab language bias especially when it comes to higher education, where courses in business, science, engineering, and medicine are taught in English or a hybridized form of Arabic and English [9]. Given the importance of the English language proficiency for both global communication and socioeconomic development, it is imperative that pedagogical approaches, curricular frameworks, and educational methodologies be modified in order to localize English language instruction, maintain Arabic's position as a cornerstone of culture and language, and incorporate elements of indigenous culture into EFL curricula. Furthermore, educational establishments like as Al-Azhar in Egypt, acknowledge that its graduates must be fluent in English in order to communicate Islamic principles to a worldwide audience.

Analyzing this relationship in relation to Brazil, Santos (2016) [10] describes instances of what she refers to as the "exportation" of American culture via a variety of mediums, such as imported goods, fashion trends, technological advancements, business methods, entertainment media, and cultural artifacts. Due to these widespread influences, Brazilians now see globalization as a threat to both the predominance of their native Portuguese language and their native cultural traditions. The significance of cultural pride and language consciousness highlighted by Santos, supports the preservation of linguistic heritage and the protection of cultural traditions as vital imperatives.

In his examination of views of the English language in East and Southeast Asia, Gao (2019) [11] suggests that learners tend to perceive it as having magical qualities, like a "magic wand." The belief that the English language instruction should take precedence over instruction in indigenous languages is mirrored in national educational policies, which reinforces linguistic hierarchies and cultural imperialism. It is imperative that understanding the linguistic and cultural variables at work allows teachers to create more effective and culturally sensitive language teaching strategies that meet the needs of students from a variety of backgrounds. Furthermore, in an increasingly interconnected world, investigating these intersections helps language learners develop intercultural competence and cross-cultural understanding.

Approaches to teaching culture

As educators become more aware of the value of intercultural competence in today's globalized society, they are placing a greater emphasis on teaching culture alongside language in EFL environments. The "cultural awareness" approach is one that has recently gained popularity and concentrates on helping students comprehend and value variances in culture. Byram (1997) [12] states that educators strive to promote intellectual inquiry and reflection on cultural standards and practices by utilizing genuine cultural materials, such as literature, and multimedia tools. The "experiential learning" method is an additional approach that stresses hands-on interaction with cultural activities. Through cultural immersion exercises like field excursions, language exchanges, and community service initiatives, students can engage with people from the target culture and get firsthand knowledge of their ideas and actions [13]. In addition, the demand for a more thorough comprehension of the political and social facets of culture has given rise to the "critical cultural awareness" approach. The aforementioned approach pushes students to think critically about equality, authority, and injustice both within and between cultures [14]. By critically analyzing literature, media, and conversation, students are challenged to confront prejudices, stereotypes, and prevailing narratives, leading to the development of a more complex and compassionate knowledge of many cultural identities. The "integrated language and culture" approach also promotes the smooth integration of language and cultural education across the curriculum. The goal of educators is to build international communicative skills and comprehensive acquisition of languages by integrating cultural content into language instruction and vice versa [15].

In the contemporary globalizing world, other approaches have emerged and called for the immersion of students' local culture into EFL learning and teaching. Kumaravadivelu (2008, 170–171) [16] states that curriculum must take into account the following five aspects in order to successfully integrate culture into EFL classrooms; cultural connectiveness, cultural complexity, cultural globality, cultural reality, and cultural identity. The "cultural content-based instruction" approach is one method that promotes the inclusion of students' native cultures in EFL instruction. The integration of cultural material from the students' personal backgrounds into language learning exercises is stressed by the aforementioned approach. In addition to encouraging feelings of pride and respect for one's own cultural heritage, academics hope to increase learners' enthusiasm for and involvement in language acquisition by utilizing well-known cultural references including rules and regulations, customs, and artifacts [17]. To give students the opportunity to study linguistic structures and cultural implications in individually significant and pertinent contexts, instructors could create language classes that combine regional stories from the past, melodies, or food [18]. The "community-based language education" approach is another one that promotes the utilization of students' native cultures in EFL instruction. This method acknowledges the value of utilizing the information and experience that students' surroundings have to offer in order to enhance their language learning. In order to fill the gap between instruction in the classroom and everyday life,

educators can develop genuine learning opportunities by forming relationships with local professionals, cultural centers, and civic groups [19]. To give students the chance to use their language abilities in relevant, community-based situations, language programs could, for example, work with locals to plan social gatherings, linguistic immersion holidays, or volunteering initiatives [20].

Language, culture, and EFL

It is often known that the primary teaching tool in language classes is the textbook. In a foreign language classroom, they could serve as the instructor, the trainer, the resource, the authority, and the ideology. For English as a Second Language (ESL) and as a Foreign Language (EFL), these textbooks are created in large quantities. In order for language learners to participate effectively in English-language communication actions, they strive to fulfill their needs. It is therefore crucial that these textbooks provide the essential elements needed to teach the language. They ought to be suitable for the level, needs, and cultural background of the students (Mahmoud, 2015a) [21]. Unfortunately, however, these resources do not often adequately capture all facets of Islamic Arabic culture, including intercultural phenomena and Islamic history, literature, feasts, and way of life. For example, local cultures should be reflected in textbooks rather than cultures that speak English. On the other hand, language instructors have little say over the EFL textbooks they use in their individual courses and are forced to use those that are centrally selected by the Ministries of Education. While educators should have the right to modify their textbooks and/or create new materials, they frequently are unable to do so because of school policies that forbid them from voicing their personal ideas about these books.

Smith (1983, 49–63) [25] states in a report regarding the EL textbook project for Somalia that the course's design starts with a quick impressionistic assessment of the country's English usage and the necessary analysis. According to the report's conclusion, the Somalia project has been created with the following criteria in mind:

1. The curriculum should be based in the surroundings of the nation and take into account the experiences and passions of its citizens.
2. The resources ought to be arranged in distinct portions, each of which should be assigned to a single teaching unit.

The inclusion of national culture by students in English language classrooms is encouraged by Mahmoud (2015b) [23]. The schema theory, which demonstrates how exposing pupils to familiar material can affect their understanding of a second language, is emphasized here. Students can concentrate more readily on other linguistic elements when they are familiar with the material. There are certain suggested activities, such as displaying items or specific foods from the local culture. However, the second group is in favor of including culture into language learning materials-but only if those materials address the culture of the target area. EFL course Egyptization was advocated by Ali (1990) and Mahmoud (2015a and 2015b) [21,23]. Sadeq (1986) adds that students ought to be required to read, write, talk, and translate on a few subjects or passages from the Holy Quran or the Islamic faith. These exercises are

primarily intended to help pupils feel more deeply a part of their community and faith, not only the English language. It is necessary to comprehend our own culture before comparing it to that of others [24].

The use of native culture of students as cultural content in English language classrooms was encouraged by Duff and Uchida (2020) [25]. Research on schema theory provides more evidence in favor of incorporating students' native cultural materials into English language classes. Atherton (1984, 71–87) states that it is advised that plays, novels, and short stories in English be included in literature classes, along with one or two Arabic works for comparison and study. This results in students developing a sense of Egyptian identity. Núñez (1988) using *El Libro de inglés*, an EFL textbook for Venezuela as an example highlight how it is important to include the culture of the learners into the text. The main geographic features of the nation have been described in a text on it. The Ministry of Education in Chile comes to the conclusion that teaching children about their own culture and nation will motivate them more. In order to accomplish its learning objectives, the ministry has created a set of textbooks for public schools called "Go for Chile". The series entitled; "Go for Chile" features a group of students from various countries on board of a ship sailing along the coasts of Chile. The scenario of the voyage enables the textbook writers to deal with Chilean places and concerns. Thus, the book is filled with information about various areas of Chile and issues facing the country. Another illustration is English for Saudi Arabia, where nearly every scene is located in the original culture. According to Hinkel (2015) [26], students are encouraged to use these resources to have conversations about their culture because doing so helps them recognize their own cultural identity.

As is the case in most, if not all, EFL contexts today, Spotlight on English an EFL textbook for Turkey, has a mostly Turkish cultural component. The primary subjects covered in English include Turkish cuisine, history, and weather. Even though some of the characters in the textbook are English-speaking tourists, their travels are only taken inside Turkey. In a similar vein, certain activities that use content from the students' home cultures have been implemented in Italy and Japan. These illustrations show how cultural content can be shaded in a variety of ways, from fully student-created to almost totally Anglo-centric. They then highlight the writers' goal of advancing the integration of national culture as subject matter in English language classes as a crucial component of a comprehensive and well-rounded curriculum. Studies show that students' acquisition of the language used to present the topic might be hampered by religious knowledge that they are unfamiliar with [27]. Here's a question that frequently arises; why do we put so much new material in their curriculum at the same time that they are learning about different cultures? If we can incorporate well-known cultural material into our English instruction, particularly for pupils at a lower level, we can lessen the processing load that students experience [1].

Utilizing material from their own cultures while studying English can also help students become more adept at expressing themselves, which is particularly useful when they need to

discuss how their identities are evolving in a language, they are unfamiliar with. Students can think they are at a loss for words when it comes to discussing difficult cultural concepts like family dynamics and morals [22]. Such ideas can be communicated through the use of English. Incorporating students' cultures into the English language classroom can also increase motivation among students and provide for a deeper understanding of their language learning objectives. Murray (2017) [28] has observed that a significant number of European educators and learners had little interest in acquiring English language skills in order to assimilate into British or American societies.

Although linguistic and learning theory has changed, culture can still be a significant component of EFL textbooks. This could be the result of their fear of assimilating into what they saw as an unfamiliar environment. Holliday (2010) [29] has proposed that EFL learners should be exposed to the target culture at a receptive level, but the productive output should reflect their own culture. This paper aims to reconcile the opposing views of conservative and progressive scholars regarding the inclusion of the target culture in the EFL textbook. The learner is thus bilingual and bicultural in a sense. However, Liddicoat (2011) [30] has proposed that contact between language and culture could be additional means of bridging this gap.

In his analysis of the educational goals of contemporary foreign language instruction, Byram and colleagues (1997) [12] have proposed that foreign language instruction should provide insights into the cultures and civilizations of the nations where the language is spoken;

1. Promoting positive attitudes toward learning foreign languages and toward foreign language speakers;
 2. Fostering a sense of self and self-awareness among students.
- It had become axiomatic to highlight the unbreakable link between language and culture, according to Wajnryb (1992, 45).

There are several instances in which awareness of the cultural component of language instruction should be found. For instance, EFL learners need to be aware of the following:

1. Acquiring knowledge of both language and culture at the same time is a must. A learner is an individual having a cultural background and worldview.
2. It is imperative to acknowledge and honor their cultural background.
3. One good thing about learning a language is having a positive attitude about the target tongue's culture.

Three important queries about textbook selection in any EFL environment were posed by Anthony (1997, 275-284):

1. Do students intend to use English for communication, or just for reading, writing, and listening?
2. In what kinds of cultural settings will the students practice using English to communicate?

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014) [31], an EFL textbook should teach both a general educational goal and a skill. Each and every human has a unique set of values derived from their culture or subculture. Cultural values are conveyed through textbooks in two ways: either in an unplanned and

implicit manner or through an explicit and preplanned manner. Nunan (2003) [32] has displayed a list of moral principles and dispositions that ought to be covered in the EFL textbook such as core principles including being conscious of one's own national, religious, and cultural history, a sense of self and connection to one's own culture, and pride in one's own nation's accomplishments. According to Smith (2018) [6], assimilating Western culture puts students' local cultures at serious risk of losing its cultural identity. He has demanded that courses be planned and created with our Islamic culture in mind. He has urged the adoption of curricula that, particularly from a religious and sociocultural perspective, do not conflict with our own culture.

Discussion and Results

This paper identifies some useful approaches for teaching culture in EFL classes and offers some workable solutions for integrating culture into EFL instruction. When teaching culture, a few different methods could be applied. Several of these methods include the following:

(1) Cultural Comparison

A crucial pedagogical strategy for fostering more cross-cultural understanding and intercultural competency in language classes is cultural comparison, which goes beyond disseminating accurate facts about the target cultures. Through presenting the cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of the target culture side by side with those from the learners' own cultural backgrounds, educators can encourage critical analysis and reflection on the similarities and contrasts between cultures [14]. This comparison method develops tolerance, empathy, and an appreciation for cultural variety in addition to raising students' cultural understanding. Furthermore, by demonstrating how idioms, linguistic expressions, and communication norms are influenced by sociocultural contexts, cultural comparison helps students understand the intricate interactions that exist between language and culture [12]. Students can be encouraged to distinguish between cultural norms and meanings, assess their experiences, and formulate critical responses to them from very early on in the language acquisition process [33]. In order to provide a foundation for comparison and contrast in language classrooms, Moran (2001, 126) [34] has argued that cultural comparison—a "*process which runs back and forth between the learner's culture and the culture under study*"—is the foundation for culture acquisition. By having students explain what they know about their own culture, you can help them become more adept at drawing comparisons and contrasts between it and other cultures.

(2) Task-Oriented Approach

The goal of the task-orientation approach in language education is to get students involved in real-world, purposeful language use by using meaningful tasks as the main focus of instruction [35]. This approach places more importance on finishing activities that involve the use of language abilities in context and less emphasis on language forms and structures alone. Tasks can include information-gap exercises, project-based learning assignments, role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving activities [36].

Task authenticity is a fundamental premise of the Task-Orientation Approach, which is based on the idea that tasks should reflect actual communication scenarios that language learners may encounter outside of the classroom [37]. A task-orientation approach has been strongly recommended by Edge (2011) [38] for the instruction of culture. This approach includes learning exercises where students collaborate in small groups or pairs to obtain specific information fragments, then present and discuss their findings "to form a more complete picture and interpret the information within the context of the target culture and in comparison, with their own culture(s)" (p. 9). These kinds of events foster positive relationships and healthy communication between members of the same ethnic group and those of other ethnic groups.

The Task-Orientation Approach also places a strong emphasis on learner-centeredness, encouraging teachers to take into account their interests, needs, and goals when creating and executing tasks [35]. Task-based activities also foster learner autonomy by involving learners in decision-making processes, task selection, and self-assessment, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning [39]. Studies on the effectiveness of task-based language teaching have demonstrated that this approach can result in significant gains in language proficiency, particularly in communicative competence and fluency. Furthermore, by offering opportunities for meaningful language practice and interaction, task-based activities enhance linguistic accuracy and fluency [35].

(3) Kramersch's "Third Places"

Drawing from sociolinguistic theory, Kramersch's concept of "Third Places" describes places that support language learning and intercultural communication outside of regular educational settings. Drawing inspiration from Ray Oldenburg's concept of "third places" in urban sociology, these spaces function as unofficial settings where people from many cultural backgrounds gather to participate in genuine conversations and significant exchanges [40]. Third Places in the context of language instruction include a broad variety of unofficial venues, such as community centers, cafes, online forums, gatherings for language exchange, and multicultural events [41]. A laid-back vibe, flexible social dynamics, and a focus on impromptu conversation are what distinguish Third Places from traditional classroom settings.

It is a contrastive approach to culture that aids learners' understanding of another culture. If language and culture are inseparable then as learners acquire a new language, they will also be acquiring a new culture. However, it cannot be expected that this culture will be the same as either the learners' native culture or the culture of the language they are studying. The learner will initially have a synthesis with their own culture, and in learning a foreign language such as English may use it in ways that express meaning in their own culture. Nevertheless, as learners' understanding of a foreign language develops, they may come to understand other values and meanings familiar to the foreign culture that are alien to their own culture. Yet their understanding of these values and meanings may still be different to that of the native speaker. This leads Kramersch (1993, 205-206) [14] to suggest that foreign language learning takes

place in a 'third place' that the learner must make for him/herself between their first culture (C1) and the foreign language culture (C2). This 'third place' involves the language learner in an objective and subjective reflection of C1 and C2 from which they must choose their own meanings that best reflect their personal perspectives. Hence this conception of culture emphasizes the importance of individual interpretations of culture rather than rigid stereotypical notions. Kramersch (1993, 205-206) [14] has proposed an examination of four aspects of culture in keeping with this view of cultural acquisition: a) establishing a sphere of intercultural - relating C1 to C2 and reflecting on perceptions of C1 and C2; b) teaching culture as an interpersonal process - going beyond the presentation of cultural facts and moving towards a process of understanding foreignness ('macro-features' such as cultural specific values and attitudes); c) teaching culture as difference - culture should not be viewed as only national traits, many other aspects of culture such as age, race, gender, social class need to be considered; and d) crossing disciplinary boundaries - Teachers need to have some understanding of a wider range of subjects such as sociology, ethnography, and sociolinguistics. If this process of acquiring culture and language is successful, learners should be able to use English in such a way as to communicate effectively with English NS and in a way that reflects their own local cultures and personal beliefs [40].

Cultural learning will only be truly meaningful if it is comparative and contrastive. If the view that teaching culture involves exposing learners to a new set of values, meanings and symbols is approved, then it follows that these new phenomena can only be understood in the light of learners' existing cultural experience. The process of comparison and contrast will lead not only to an engagement with the stimulus culture, but also to a greater understanding of the learner's own culture. In learning a foreign language, gaining access to a different way of seeing the world is not the only privilege; but it also inevitably leads EFL learners to reconsider their own world-view and in this sense, all cultural learning can be said to be inter-cultural [42].

Kramersch highlights how Third Places have the power to reshape learners' identities and promote cross-cultural understanding. Through collaborative activities and dialogues, language learners acquire not just language proficiency but also an understanding of diverse cultural viewpoints and worldviews [43]. Third Places also give students a stage on which to negotiate and build their identities in connection to the language and culture of the target society, which fosters a feeling of integration and belonging [41]. Studies have demonstrated how this method improves language learning outcomes, such as motivation, fluency, and sociocultural competency [44]. Third Places also give students the chance to create social networks and genuine connections with language speakers, which can help them further with their language acquisition and cultural adaptation [43]. Finally, Kramersch's Third Places notion emphasizes the significance of informal, sociocultural situations for intercultural communication and language learning. Third Places enhance language acquisition and aid in the development of well-rounded, culturally competent people by offering venues for genuine contact and cultural exchange.

Conclusion

Teaching culture is presumably outdated in the genuine definition of the concept. Early ESL and EFL instruction witnessed the emergence of cultural components. Nevertheless, given that incorporating culture into EFL instruction is one of the most pressing and important issues in the field, this paper renders guidelines for future research on how to incorporate culture instruction into EFL classroom practices and what steps to follow to facilitate efficient interaction between cultures. The majority of communicative techniques highlight the close relationship between language learning and culture teaching, and this paper discusses some of the key concerns and problems surrounding the integration of culture into EFL/ESL classrooms. The significance of cultural sensitivity in the material of EFL textbooks is emphasized. Finding a balance is important since failing to take into account the cultural background of students might make it more difficult for them to participate and understand. Curriculum designers need to be very careful when choosing themes for their curricula so that they avoid any potential conflicts and speak to the cultural backgrounds of their pupils. This approach not only cultivates an enhanced comprehension of varied cultural viewpoints but also advances inclusion and pertinence in language-learning resources. Incorporating aspects of students' native cultures into EFL textbooks can also strengthen their sense of self and connection to the learning process, which will ultimately improve their language learning experience. Educators may create more meaningful and successful learning experiences for students across a variety of cultural contexts by embracing cultural diversity and sensitivity in EFL materials. The conclusion that can be drawn from the ideas, opinions, and suggestions presented above is that the content of EFL texts ought to be culturally appropriate for the learners. When creating EFL textbooks for students, a middle ground should be taken. It is not appropriate to completely ignore the culture of other languages. Curriculum planners ought to exercise discernment in their selection of themes, ensuring that they avoid conflicts with students' local culture while simultaneously addressing a range of issues directly related to it. This level of topical acquaintance with different cultures also supports incorporating students' local culture into EFL textbook content. After all, it is intended that this work will keep on to illuminate EFL experts, scholars, and curriculum designers for optimal learning and instruction irrespective of the TEFL setting.

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