

The representation of the Algerian culture and identity in the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks

مكانة الثقافة والهوية الجزائرية في الكتب المدرسية للطورين المتوسط والثانوي في الجزائر

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Abstract

The teaching of local and other cultures and the development of the learner identity has become key aspects of English foreign language (EFL) textbooks. Most of the previous studies on the Algerian EFL textbooks have focused on the place of the target culture. This paper, rather, explores the representation of the Algerian culture and identity in the Algerian middle and secondary schools EFL textbooks. Two checklists (one about culture and the other about identity) were used to evaluate the place of the local culture and identity in the aforementioned textbooks. The findings show that the Algerian EFL textbooks incorporate the home culture and identity. However, the secondary school textbooks focus less on the Algerian social norms and values. Moreover, all the textbooks in question show that the Algerian community is in the doorway house between modernity and tradition. Consequently, it is suggested to better represent the Algerian culture as it is to avoid the risks of acculturation and to build the third space, encompassing the dynamic interaction of various cultures (Kramsch, 1998).

Key—words: Culture—Identity—Middle School—Secondary School—Textbook.

المخلص:

أصبح تدريس الثقافات المحلية وغيرها وتنمية هوية المتعلم من الجوانب الرئيسية للكتب المدرسية للغة الإنجليزية. ركزت معظم الدراسات السابقة على مكانة الثقافة الأجنبية في الكتب المدرسية للغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في الجزائر. في حين يستكشف هذا المقال مدى تجسيد الثقافة والهوية الجزائرية في الكتب المدرسية للطورين المتوسط والثانوي في الجزائر. تم استخدام قائمتين (إحداهما عن الثقافة والأخرى حول الهوية) لتقييم مكان الثقافة والهوية المحلية في الكتب المدرسية المذكورة أعلاه. بينت النتائج أن الكتب المدرسية للغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية تدمج الثقافة والهوية المحلية. في حين تركز كتب الطور الثانوي بدرجة أقل على الأعراف والقيم

الاجتماعية الجزائرية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن جميع الكتب المدرسية المذكورة تبين المجتمع الجزائري ما بين الأصالة والمعاصرة. وبالتالي، يُقترح تمثيل الثقافة الجزائرية على نحو أفضل لتجنب مخاطر التثاقف وبناء الفضاء الثالث الذي يشمل التفاعل الديناميكي لمختلف الثقافات (Kramsch, 1998).
الكلمات المفتاحية: الثقافة ; الهوية ; الطور المتوسط ; الطور الثانوي ; الكتاب المدرسي.

Introduction

Teaching and learning a foreign language involves not only inculcating the linguistic competence, but also teaching the target culture and identity along with many other types of knowledge and skills. Culture could be defined in this context as the way we behave in a given social context while identity can be said to represent what we are that makes us different from others. Therefore, learning a new language involves equally learning a new way of behaving and a novel identity. However, this does not imply abandoning one's home culture or identity. Rather, it means extension of the way we behave and altering the way we see the world and others, without completely abandoning our initial representations and social processes and habits.

Exploring the culture and identity of an added language has been demonstrated as crucial for interpreting and producing meaningful messages in the target language (Faure, 1999, Matsumoto, 2000). Indeed, language and culture are interrelated, that is, the linguistic system does not function in the vacuum; rather it is embedded in a socio-cultural milieu and it is a means for achieving socio-cultural functions of language.

With regard to the examination of the composite of culture in the Algerian English foreign language (EFL) context, this component seems to have been widely reviewed, notably in relation to school textbook analysis (e.g., Riche & Soryana, 2012; Messekher, 2014; Larouk, 2015; Ait Aissa, 2018). Nevertheless, most of these previous studies have focused on the investigation of the place of the English language culture in the Algerian school textbooks and syllabuses. It seems that this target culture is

perceived as if it is the only crucial component for intercultural encounters and communication, though this foreign culture should actually be introduced in relation to the home culture.

In connection with the examination of identity in the Algerian school textbooks, this component seems to be almost neglected. A few studies (e.g., Amziane & Gandouzi, 2015; Zouaoui, 2019) have attempted to deal with the component of identity, be it local or foreign. Therefore, it is deemed convenient to look at whether the identity of the native speaker is presented in relation to the learner's.

On the basis of the above background, this study focuses on the representation of the Algerian culture and identity in the middle and secondary school EFL textbooks and poses the following research questions.

1) To what extent do the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks represent the Algerian social identity?

2) What is the attitude of the textbook authors towards the Algerian social identity (i.e. do they show a high or a low opinion towards it?)

3) To what extent do the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks represent the Algerian culture?

4) Is the Algerian home culture taught in the Algerian middle and secondary school textbooks through the skills of critical thinking such as comparison, interpreting and relating?

1. Culture and Identity

In this section, the constructs of this study are defined to help the reader understand the gist of these illusive concepts and their major components which will be taken up for analysis of the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks. The first notion to be presented is identity, and then the concept of culture will follow.

1.1. Identity

The first psychologist who attempts to define identity in the 1950s is Erik Erickson who characterizes it into ego (self-pride) and a set of features that define the group. Likewise, Fearon (1999) elucidates the construct of identity by dividing it into two sub-sets that are *social identity* and *personal identity*. Accordingly, social identity meaning refers to membership to a particular social group that is defined by certain rules, and personal meaning refers to special social attributes that a person takes pride in. The first denotes membership and the second designates pride and dignity with regard to certain defining characteristics.

Similarly, in his self-categorization theory, Turner (1999) divides identity into two aspects: *self-categorization* and *affect*. Self categorization refers to the feeling of membership to a given group while self-affect refers to the way one perceives his/her belonging, that is, whether one has a high or low opinion of his/her identity characteristics. Thus, individuals cannot evade pertaining to a specific group by the sheer fact of sharing the same social affinities (such as location, gender, race, history, nationality, language, religious beliefs, ethnicity, esthetics, food), but they could, on the other hand, show different feelings towards those defining characteristics, which could be a source of pride or humility and disapproval.

1.2. Culture

Hofstede (2001) defines it as “*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*” (p. 9). This means culture is a social marking that distinguishes different groups of people. Earlier, Larson and Smalley (1972) define it as an outline that determines the behavior of people in a given community. All these definition suggest that culture dictates how to behave and makes that way of conduct different from the behavior of other groups.

Matsumodo (2000), in his turn, provides a more elaborate definition of culture stating that it is a dynamic social system that is built up on the basis of beliefs, norms, and behaviors. Accordingly, culture is in constant change depending on the survival needs. Indeed, each culture is constantly enriched by new products and social processes imported from other cultures to ensure survival and continuity (Mollès, 2007). For example, new types of food and clothes are borrowed from other culture which will in the long run become integral parts of the recipient culture.

Consequently, it could be safely said that there is no typical culture that is entirely linked to old practices and that the culture of an individual or a group of individuals is linked to a given period of time (Brown, 2006). Additionally, as further stated in Matsumodo's (2000) definition, culture is "*relatively stable but with the potential to change across time*" (p. 24).

2. Research Methodology

This section includes the type of study, research procedures, analyzed documents, and research instruments.

2.1. Type of Study

This study is a program evaluation; it examines the extent to which the Algerian middle and the secondary school EFL textbooks incorporate the local culture and identity and the attitudes of the textbook writers towards their social identity representation. Thus, as Nunan (1992) points out, the study basically looks at the effectiveness of a teaching plan or doctrine in achieving the goals of an educational institution and suggests alternative formulations for the system in case it is proven impaired in its function.

2.2. Research Procedure

The criteria of textbook analysis are applied one by one to the cultural and identity contents of the textbooks included in reading/listening passages, practice

activities, and illustrations. The researcher goes through all the textbooks-unit contents; analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the cultural and identity components in accordance to the pre-specified standards. Then, the data is noted in prose and references are kept to locate again specific information, if needed. Some of the important quotes are extracted from the target textbooks and used for illustrations in the findings and discussion sections.

2.3. Documents

Seven Algerian EFL textbooks devised for students aged between 12 to 18 years old are analyzed from the perspectives of the local culture and identity representation. The textbooks in question include four middle school texts named *My Book of English: year1/2/3/4*. The other three books are secondary school EFL textbooks, *AT the Crossroads* (year 1); *Getting through* (year 2), and *New Prospects* (year 3).

2.4. Research Instruments

Evaluative checklists composed of criteria are used to assess the representation of home culture and identity in the Algerian EFL textbooks. However, the identity checklist includes the author's attitudes towards the characteristics of the Algerian identity (refer to Appendix 1) whereas the culture grids adds a section to assess the methodology of teaching (see Appendix 2).

3. Findings

This section presents the major findings of the study. The most significant results are highlighted in the table, then they are followed by commentaries to help the reader better understand the most important patterns.

3.1. Findings from the Analysis of the Identity Component in the Textbooks

This sub-section presents the findings yielded from the analysis of the component of identity in the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks.

Table 1: Results from textbooks' identity analyses

Items	Representation in the textbook	
Identity	Self-categorization	Affect
location	North Africa	- Coasts, vastness, Sahara, strategic situation as a sense of pride
gender	Heroic women	- A sense of pride towards women
race	Arab/Berber	- Highlighting historical deeds as a source of pride
history	Algerian Revolution	- Valuing the national collective memory of the war of liberation that is a factor of unity and identity - Underscoring suffering and struggling as a key factor for strong personality-building
nationality	Algerian	- Highlighting the international achievements (e.g., sportsman/women, National football team/ Algerian modern scientists)
language	Arabic & Tamazight	- Arabic as the working language/Tamazight as a cultural heritage (e.g., preservation of Tifinagh)
religious	Islam	- Unifying force - Empathy towards other religions
ethnicity	Arab/ Muslim	- Algeria identified more as an Eastern nation (e.g., Conquest of Andalusia/Attoman figures/Gaza/Arab science)
beliefs	Playing musical instruments/dancing Reading	- Valued as a traditional heritage -Reading as religious obligation
esthetics	Painting, literature, traditional music	- Omar Racim, Mohammed Issiakhen, Mouloud Feraoun, Moufdi Zakaria, Mohammed Dib
food	Traditional	Focus more on traditional food (Couscous) Vs. Junk food

As can be seen in Table 1 above, on the whole, the Algerian EFL textbooks do incorporate the Algerian identity along the target culture into these National textbooks. However, it should be noted that secondary school textbooks seem less focused on the local culture compared to middle school textbooks. Probably, the authors of middle school textbooks are more enthusiastic about making the learners discover the new foreign identity, as well as their own.

With regard to the presentation of specific components of identity in the Algerian EFL textbooks and the authors' attitudes towards them, the researcher has noted that, for example, the geographical location of Algeria is well-documented and the authors seem to take a sense of pride in this aspect because of the diversity of landscapes, the vastness of the territory, and the strategic location.

Similarly, the Algerian war of liberation is highly stressed as a unifying factor for Algerians; and the textbook authors invoke the bravery and patience of Algerian freedom fighters. In general, the Algerian writers attempt to stress most of the identity traits that could constitute a source of national self-importance from sports to science. The following quote illustrates how the textbook authors show pride in the Algerian female freedom fighters: *"Famous Algerian women freedom fighters who fought for the freedom and dignity of people"* (Boukri et al., 2019. p. 54). This quote equally indicates that Algerian women are presented as heroines of war and stresses the value of dignity among Algerians

Last but not the least, there seems to be ambivalence in the presentation of food. The Algerian EFL textbook authors attempt to focus on traditional dishes (such as couscous) as part of the Algerian identity, yet this tradition is undergoing a process of change. They have noted that such dishes are reserved to special occasions, but they do not really give a more precise description of the food that Algerians consume at this particular point of time.

3.2. Findings from the Analysis of the Cultural Component in the Textbook

This headline presents the findings of the analysis of the cultural composite in the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks and reports the model of its teaching procedures.

Table 2: Results from textbooks' cultural analyses

Items	Representations in the textbooks	Teaching methodology	
		Factual listing	Critical thinking analysis
customs	- A change in lifestyle (transportation, food, clothes)	- Texts	- Absence of comparison
dress	- Traditional dress vs. fashion	- Illustrations	- Absence of interpretation
symbols	- Hand-raising, listening, quieting, thinking, and goodbye gestures	- Linguistic	- Absence of relating
artifacts	- Martyr monument, pottery, carpets, jewelry, Oud, drum, Tipaza Roman ruins, suspended bridges of Constantine, Al Quala Beni Hammad, M'zab Valley, The Casbah	activities	- Absence of culturally focused activities
values	- Freedom, dignity, charity, hard work, scholarship - Focus on modern and universal values		
social norms	- Place of eating, furniture, cutlery (mixed social norms), traditional dress worn on special occasions - Collecting litter/visiting relatives/table manners /corruption as an ill of society /fighting cheating/ parents decide for their kids/ /people don't pay attention to their energy balance/boys inviting boys to a restaurant /students chat/showing family photos to foreigners /telling names of mothers to others/teeth brush in the morning/stand for national anthem - Don't chew in class - Don't write on walls - Unveiled women with make-up		
technology	- Use of mobiles and computers for accessing the internet (calling and sending emails) - Research purposes (projects) - Other electronic devices such as memory stick, flash drive, smart card		

The analysis of the home culture representation in the middle and secondary school Algerian EFL textbooks shows that the secondary school textbooks equally do not sufficiently expose the home culture while the middle education textbooks supply ample factual information about this topic.

As the Table 2 above displays, the Algerian EFL textbooks note a change in the lifestyle in various aspects of life such as food, dress, and transportation. This fact is explicitly expressed in second year high school textbook in the following words: *“Our eating habits have changed completely over the last years”* (Riche, Ameziane, Hami, Arab, & Bensemmane, 2006, p. 24). Thus, in a way the textbooks lament the disappearance of the old cultural practices.

With regard to the portrayal of the Algerian artifacts and objects, the middle school textbooks cater satisfactorily for this cultural factor. They describe many of the historical objects and monuments such as Martyr Monument, pottery, carpets, and jewelry. However and again, these textbooks call attention to the fact many of the historical cultural objects are falling into disfavor or dying. This thought is regrettably reported in the following excerpt: *“Because of modern life, the Imzad, and all the culture that goes with it, is dying”* (Bouazid, Samara, & Boukri, 2017, p. 34). The textbook authors rightfully bring to light the fact that the disappearance of a cultural object entails the fading of its corresponding social practices.

As far as arts and esthetics are concerned, the junior school textbooks depict adequately the Algerian arts and figures of arts, while the high school textbooks only superficially hint into this aspect of culture. In fact, as stated in the subsequent quote, the middle school textbooks show the awareness of the importance of admiring the figures of arts as a way of preserving the Algerian cultural identity. One of the objectives of these textbook is stated as follows *“Raising awareness of the importance of outstanding figures in history, literature, and Arts as the custodians of cultural identity and values”* (Boukri, 2019, p. 41).

With reference to values and norms, again they are more amply described in the middle education textbooks than in their counterparts of secondary education. Among the values of Algerians underscored in the textbooks are the following:

Freedom, dignity, charity, hard work, and scholarship. Concerning social norms, the textbooks depict many Algerian social norms such as place of eating, furniture, cutlery, and visiting others.

However, it is to be noted that these textbooks sometimes present foreign social norms as being typically Algerian. For instance, in the first year middle education textbook, it is shown that the fictitious Algerian character Omar sends his family tree pictures by mail to his e-friend, Margaret, and asks her, in turn, to send him her family's (Hammoudi, Boukri, & Smara, 2016, p. 61) . This could be considered as a case of acculturation because the Algerian social norms rule out this practice.

Finally, in connection with the representation of technology in the Algerian EFL textbooks, the technological means that are fully presented in the textbooks are computers and mobile phone. Computers are shown to be used for playing games, sending mails, creating blogs, and researching for project work purposes.

4. Revisiting research questions

This section discusses the findings stated in the previous section and attempts to answer the research questions in the context of the review of the literature.

4.1. Research Question 1

The Algerian middle education textbooks and, to a lesser degree, the secondary schooling EFL textbooks depict the Algerian identity. The middle education textbooks not only extensively provide factual information about the home identity, but also attempt to instill into the learner awareness of the historical and current identity carriers such as paintings and traditional music. A major difference between the middle grade and the secondary grade textbooks is that the middle school textbooks spotlight more the Algerian traditional identity heritage while the secondary school textbooks are more inclined towards the representation of modern and present-day identity. For example, the middle school textbooks depict the

heroism of the Algerian woman during the periods of French colonial struggle and almost offer no representation of current identity of the Algerian woman.

Conversely, Zouaoui's (2019) findings contradict drastically with the above findings. She thinks that the Algerian English language textbooks focus only on the present-day nation representation. A review of the middle school textbooks will, however, show that these textbooks report amply the Algerian war as a source of National pride and a unifying force, write about the Algerian art figures, and depict traditional food habits. The subsequent excerpt from the middle school textbook, *My Book of English, Year Four*, supports strongly this argument. It states one of its objectives in this way: "*Raising awareness of the importance of landmarks as a vehicle for cultural identity*" (Boukri et al., 2019, p. 42). This excerpt constitutes one of the attitudes that this textbook tries to teach to the junior school pupils.

Additionally, Zouaoui's (2019) argument seems to be built on the fact that identity representation should promote modernity. Contrarily, the argument developed in this paper holds that identity depiction should take a descriptive stance towards the current identity of the individual sustained with its historical dimension that gives a fuller understanding of the existing identity traits. A prescriptive approach to identity representation based on universal values may lead to the deformation of the real nature of an individual's or nation's identity.

As Ameziane and Gandouzi (2015) argue, the Algerian identity representation in the EFL course books follows a hybrid approach because actually the current cultural identity shows a concoction of modernity and tradition. Consequently, a middle-ground approach would depict the Algerian identity traits as they are perceived now through our cultural lens and the lens of the universal declaration of human rights (Collès, 2007).

4.2. Research Question

The textbook authors of middle and secondary schools show a high opinion towards the Algerian identity. This pride is derived allegedly from the strategic location and geographical characteristics of Algeria, the popular war of liberation, the prestigious racial and religious achievements in science, the cultural diversity, and the modern achievements in science and sports.

4.3. Research Question 3

The Algerian culture is suitably documented especially in the middle school textbooks. The textbook authors of junior school highlight a change in the Algerian lifestyles, notably because of the process of modernization; illustrate some typical Algerian non-verbal language such as listening, quieting, and thinking gestures; describe some social norms such as standing for the National anthem, visiting relatives, and eating manners and places; list cultural values of Algerians such as freedom, dignity, charity, hard work, and scholarship; and describe technological tools presently used.

Nevertheless, it seems that the textbook authors' view is entrenched in the belief that culture is the inherited social practices and beliefs unaffected by the process of modernity. Therefore, there is an inclination towards the description of the old behaviors and values. In actual fact, culture refers a present-day way of life (Brown, 2006). There is no static culture; rather individuals' way of life has the potential for change at any point in its historical development (Matsumoto, 2000; Brown, 2006). According to Collès (2007) the process of change creates clashes and conflicts that are solved later and become stable

Accordingly, the Algerian textbook authors should portray the Algerian culture as it is now, not as it was. For instance, textbook illustrations could picture Algerian women as veil-wearing and non-veil-wearing because this is the cultural reality of

Algeria. Presenting Algerian females as all veiled is a kind of culture imposition and presenting them as all non-veiled is a case of cultural alienation and acculturation.

Similarly, forcing values of modernity (Westernization) and openness into the Algerian cultural representation is a serious case of cultural misrepresentation and distortion. For instance, illustrative pictures that present all Algerian females as unveiled and wearing make-up are a case of socialization of pupils into a foreign lifestyle. Since the big majority of the Algerian females are veiled, it is desirable to equally include in the textbook visual illustrations of veiled girls and women.

Likewise, as consistently reported by Riche and Soryana (2012), Ait Aissa (2018), and Zouaoui (2019), the secondary school course books attempt to instill into pupils modern and universal values (such as tolerance and openness). This tendency could, to some extents, be considered as a form of acculturation. It is rather the local cultural values that should be presented and discussed in relation to the universal declaration of human rights as a filter to decide which norms are universally rejected and which ones are universally accepted (Collès, 2007).

4.4. Research Question

The Algerian EFL pupils' books give factual information about lifestyles, famous historical figures, and architectural landmarks of both the native and target cultures, but they do not develop what Byram et al. (2002) call comparative analysis. Both cultures are presented in a linear fashion, with no space given to the learners to reflect on the social practices of the target culture and compare them to theirs.

For example, in the fourth year middle school textbook, *My Book of English, Year Four*, the textbook authors first present in the first unit of instruction the London's outstanding architectural landmarks (such as Big Ben and Westminster Palace) in the first sequence, then in another, they present the Algerian landmarks

such as Timgad and Tipaza Roman ruins. Yet, it is stated in this sequence that one of its target skills is the comparison of landmarks.

The teaching of both the linguistic system and the cultural system of a foreign language should be carried out in relation to learner linguistic or cultural system to develop a dynamic and interwoven bilingual communicative competence (Blanchet, 2002). Actually, analyzing, interpreting, and relating the target culture to learners' own culture may permit them to understand and expect certain behaviors of foreigner and allow them to understand their own culture, and thereby develop their own identity (Faure, 1999).

5. Pedagogical recommendations

On the basis of the findings that have come up from this study, the following pedagogical recommendations are made to syllabus designers, textbook authors, and teachers to incorporate adequately the Algerian culture and identity into the Algerian middle and secondary school EFL textbooks.

- Highlighting Algerian cultural values other than those of freedom fighting, instead, of focusing on universal values
- Secondary school textbooks should focus more on the reinforcement of the Algerian cultural identity
- Removing some social behaviors that are unacceptable in the Algerian cultural identity (such showing family pictures to foreigners) that could lead to acculturation
- Representing the present-day Algerian cultural identity
- Using a comparative rather than a linear approach to the teaching of culture
- Spelling out cultural comparison

Conclusion

This study has show that the middle school EFL textbooks include various aspects of the Algerian identity and culture. They for example, depict the Algerian history, location, traditional tools, lifestyles, and clothes and they take pride in these National aspects of identity and culture. The third year textbook, *My Book of English*, is even excessively focused on the Algerian cultural identity interpretation. However, some aspects of acculturation are dissected in these books such as presenting modern/Western aspects of life and behaviors as standard ones. Besides, the presentation of the Algerian culture seems defective in the sense that the textbooks focus on past aspects of the Algerian identity and culture rather than the present-day aspects.

With regards to the secondary school EFL textbooks, they seem less focused on the portrayal of the Algerian culture and identity. They tend to present markedly international cultural identities and they cater exceptionally for universal and modern values at the expense of local ones.

As far as the culture teaching methodology is concerned, it seems inadequate as it does not confront the local culture to other cultures to promote the learner self-identity and understanding of others. This teaching inadequacy could result in the formation of two inert and isolate cultural compartments, one representing the self and a further representing the other.

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