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THE UNSEEN CULTURAL IDEOLOGIES IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PICTURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN: INSIGHTS FROM ALGERIA

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Abstract: English-language picture books have become a widely used resource for early bilingual education, supporting children's linguistic and cognitive development. However, these materials also transmit cultural values and social norms that may differ from those of the local context. This study investigates Algerian parents' awareness and perceptions of the cultural content embedded in English-language picture books and examines the extent to which they perceive potential tensions between these representations and traditional Algerian values. In pursuance of the research aim, a mixed-methods research design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to 186 Algerian parents of children from eight wilayas in eastern Algeria who had introduced or considered introducing English-language picture books. Participants were recruited using a non-probability snowball sampling strategy via online platforms and social media groups. To enrich the findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 parents from different Algerian regions. In addition, a content analysis was conducted on a purposively selected corpus of 20 English-language picture books and illustrated storybooks commonly accessible to Algerian families. Findings show that most parents recognize the educational value of English-language picture books while also identifying cultural elements that may differ from Algerian traditions. Perceived areas of cultural divergence include family relationships, gender roles, social behavior, and moral values. While many parents adopt a selective and reflective approach when choosing reading materials, others demonstrate limited awareness of the cultural messages embedded in texts and illustrations. The content analysis confirms the presence of both explicit and implicit cultural representations that may not fully align with local cultural and religious norms. Hence, the study emphasizes parents' role as cultural mediators in early literacy and the importance of selecting children's literature that balances bilingual development with cultural identity and values.

***Keywords**:* Bilingual education; cultural identity; cultural representation; early literacy; English-language picture books

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1. Introduction

Bilingualism is widely recognized for its cognitive and linguistic advantages, enhancing children's intellectual flexibility, problem-solving skills, and communication abilities. As English has become the global lingua franca, a growing number of Algerian parents are introducing it to their children at an early age to equip them with better educational and professional opportunities. One of the most effective tools for early language acquisition is picture books. These books not only help children learn new words and improve their reading skills, but they also spark imagination and emotional growth.

However, beyond their linguistic benefits, picture books also serve as cultural carriers. They also introduce children and adolescents to different cultural values, beliefs and ideas mainly through their narratives and illustrations. Many popular English-language picture books and short stories include themes, behaviors, and messages that may not fully align with Algerian Muslim values. Since children and young adolescents at early stages of development lack the cognitive maturity to critically analyze what they read, and to distinguish between acceptable and inappropriate values, they might unconsciously absorb ideas that conflict with or do not match their cultural and religious beliefs.

A significant concern is that many parents, while eager to provide their children, whether children or young adolescents, with English-language resources, may not be fully aware of the hidden messages and the implicit cultural influences present in these books. As a result, children are exposed to narratives that could shape their perceptions of identity, morality and societal roles in ways that diverge from their own cultural and religious backgrounds.

To address this issue, the study investigates Algerian parents' awareness and attitudes toward the cultural content of English-language picture books, with the ultimate aim of raising their consciousness about the importance of selecting literature that not only supports language learning but also aligns with their cultural and personal values.

Based on these research aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Q1- How do Algerian parents perceive the cultural values represented in English-language picture books?

Q2- What potential conflicts, if any, do Algerian parents identify between the cultural values in English-language picture books and traditional Algerian cultural values?

Given the exploratory nature of the study, no formal hypotheses were formulated. However, it was anticipated that parents would recognize both educational benefits and cultural challenges associated with English-language picture books and that concerns would be most evident regarding family, social, and moral values.

2. Literature Review

Picture books for children are a form of illustrated literature in which visual and textual elements work together to tell a story, often designed for early readers to enhance language development and cognitive skills (Kiefer & Tyson, 2023). These books typically feature engaging narratives supported by illustrations that not only complement but also enrich the storytelling experience (Dillon et al., 2024). In this study, the operational definition of picture books extends to include short stories specifically designed with full-page illustrations that visually support the narrative, ensuring alignment with the research focus.

In Algeria, where multilingualism is already a norm due to the coexistence of Arabic, Tamazight and French, English is increasingly becoming an additional linguistic priority for parents. Many parents believe that introducing English at an early age offers their children academic and cognitive advantages (Idri, 2014; Sahraoui, 2024). English is often perceived not only as a tool for global communication but also as a cognitive enhancer, facilitating access to better educational and career opportunities (Crystal, 2003). Thus, parents see bilingualism as a means of ensuring their children's success in a globalized world.

In Algeria, many parents are increasingly introducing their children to English through short stories and picture books, recognizing the language's importance in education and future career prospects (Sahraoui, 2024; Chouihat & Bagui, 2024). While these books are often valued for their linguistic benefits, they also carry implicit cultural messages shaped by Western values, which may subtly influence children's perceptions of identity, society and traditions (Phekani, 2023; Su, 2023; Abbassa & Lassoued, 2026). Parents may not always be aware of these underlying cultural narratives, as their primary focus tends to be on language learning rather than the ideological content embedded in the stories and illustrations.

The dominance of English as a global lingua franca has led to its widespread adoption across various linguistic and cultural contexts. Yet, the growing demand for English proficiency and the linguistic shift to this international language is not merely functional; it carries sociocultural implications that merit attention. Canagarajah (2005) highlighted that while English provides access to global resources and networks, it also transmits implicit cultural values associated with Western ideologies. In the Algerian context, where French has historically been the dominant foreign language, English is often regarded as a neutral and modern alternative. However, the cultural narratives embedded in English-language media and literature may subtly influence children's perceptions of identity and belonging, an aspect that parents and educators must critically assess (Adam et al., 2024).

Parents often view English as a necessary skill for their children's future success, leading them to incorporate English-language materials, such as picture books, into early childhood education. However, while parents prioritize English for its perceived advantages, they may overlook its potential impact on cultural identity. Al-Qudah (2015) warns that foreign language exposure, particularly through literature, may introduce children to unfamiliar cultural ideologies. Parents may not always be aware of the subtle messages embedded in English-language materials, which can shape children's worldviews in ways that diverge from local cultural norms.

Children's literature is a powerful tool for language development and cultural transmission (Idri, 2014). Nodelman (1992) argues that children's books are often embedded with cultural assumptions that reflect the ideologies of the societies in which they are produced. When English-language picture books are introduced in Algeria, they do not merely serve as linguistic resources; they also introduce foreign social norms, values and ways of thinking.

In the same vein, Perry (2012) emphasizes that picture books act as both language and culture carriers. Imported English-language books may portray Western lifestyles, individualism, and family dynamics that differ from Algerian traditions. As a result, children exposed primarily to foreign literature may develop perceptions of the world that do not align with their cultural reality. While exposure to diverse cultures is beneficial, it is essential for parents and educators to ensure that children also engage in literature that reflects their native linguistic and cultural heritage.

The interplay between language learning and cultural identity is particularly significant in non-Western contexts. Zohar (2018) highlights that educational systems in Arab societies emphasize cultural values that may contrast with those depicted in Western literature. For Algerian children, engaging with English-language picture books may create a dual identity: one rooted in local traditions and another shaped by foreign influences.

Nasir (2012) argues that exposure to literature reflecting one's cultural heritage strengthens a child's sense of self and belonging. Conversely, an overreliance on foreign literature may weaken children's connection to their native culture. Parents and educators must therefore strive to balance linguistic development with cultural preservation, ensuring that children's exposure to English-language books does not come at the expense of their connection to Algerian identity.

The cognitive and emotional maturity of children determines how they process and internalize the content of literature. Piaget (1952 as cited in Crawford et al., 2024) and Kohlberg (1981) emphasize that children's ability to engage with abstract concepts evolves over time. Young learners, particularly those under the age of six, lack the critical thinking skills needed to discern cultural messages embedded in literature, making them more susceptible to internalizing foreign ideologies.

Zohar (2018) stresses that early exposure to foreign cultural values should be balanced with efforts to nurture children's native cultural identity. In the Algerian context, this means selecting English-language picture books that align with local values while also introducing global perspectives. Parents play a crucial role in guiding their children's literary experiences, ensuring that they benefit linguistically without losing touch with their cultural roots.

The increasing presence of English in Algeria reflects broader globalization trends, leading to the emergence of transcultural identities. While English-language materials provide access to global knowledge, they also contribute to shaping children's perceptions of self and society. This dynamic underscores the need for critical engagement with language learning materials.

Incorporating English into early childhood education should not be seen as merely a linguistic exercise but as a broader process of identity formation. By fostering bilingualism while maintaining a strong connection to native cultural heritage, Algerian parents and educators can help children navigate the complexities of multilingualism in an increasingly interconnected world.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of Algerian parents' perceptions of cultural values in English-language picture books. Data were collected through three complementary methods: an online questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a content analysis of selected English-language picture books and illustrated storybooks.

The target population for the questionnaire consisted of Algerian parents of children residing in the eastern region of Algeria, specifically in the wilayas of Annaba, Batna, Guelma, Khenchela, Oum El Bouaghi, Skikda, Souk Ahras, and Tebessa. The study focused on parents who had introduced or considered introducing English-language picture books to their children. To reach a diverse group of participants, the questionnaire was distributed through multiple online platforms, including direct sharing with parents and postings in Facebook groups. Given the nature of online distribution, a non-probability snowball sampling strategy with voluntary participation was employed. Respondents were encouraged to share the questionnaire link with other eligible parents, resulting in 186 complete responses.

The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on parents' attitudes toward cultural values presented in English-language children's literature, their perceptions of potential cultural conflicts, and their views on the influence of such books on children's development. Although efforts were made to reach participants from different wilayas and socio-demographic backgrounds, no formal quotas were established for variables such as gender, educational level, socioeconomic status, or urban-rural residence. Consequently, the sample cannot be considered statistically representative of all Algerian parents. This limitation should be taken into account when interpreting the findings, as parents with a greater interest in English-language education may have been more likely to participate.

To complement the survey findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 parents from various Algerian wilayas, including Annaba, Guelma, Batna, Khenchela, Oum El Bouaghi, Souk Ahras, Algiers, Oran, Illizi, Biskra, Tlemcen, Sidi Bel Abbès, and Tiaret. These interviews provided qualitative insights into parents' perceptions of the cultural content embedded in English-language picture books, the extent to which they identified cultural similarities or conflicts, and the strategies they employed to discuss cultural differences with their children.

The interview data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The responses were reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data, after which initial codes were generated by identifying recurring ideas, concerns, and experiences. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes, which were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. The resulting themes were then interpreted in relation to the research questions and integrated with the quantitative findings, enabling the identification of recurring patterns concerning cultural compatibility, perceived benefits of English-language books, parental mediation practices, and concerns about potential cultural conflicts.

The third data collection method involved a content analysis of 20 English-language picture books and illustrated storybooks commonly accessible to Algerian families through online bookstores, educational websites, public recommendations, and social media groups dedicated to children's English-language learning. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select books that were widely recommended for children and frequently used by parents introducing English at home. The selected corpus represented a range of themes, including family relationships, friendship, school life, gender roles, cultural traditions, and moral values. The aim was not to achieve statistical representativeness but rather to examine the cultural messages that Algerian children are likely to encounter during early exposure to English-language literature.

The content analysis focused on themes related to family dynamics, gender roles, social interactions, cultural practices, and moral values. Drawing on the study objectives and relevant literature on children's literature, cultural representation, and value transmission, a coding framework was developed to analyze both textual and visual content. The books were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes and representations. Particular attention was given to instances where the values portrayed aligned with or diverged from traditional Algerian and Islamic values. Through this analysis, the study sought to identify patterns across the corpus and to explore how implicit and explicit cultural messages may shape children's perceptions of identity, belonging, social norms, and morality.

4. Results

4.1. Questionnaire Findings

Frequency of Reading English-Language Picture Books

As shown in Figure 01, 35% of parents reported that their children read English-language picture books a few times a week, while 22% indicated that it is done at a daily exposure; 19% said they rarely do so; 18% who stated that their children engage in this activity once a week; against 6% who said that their children never read such books.

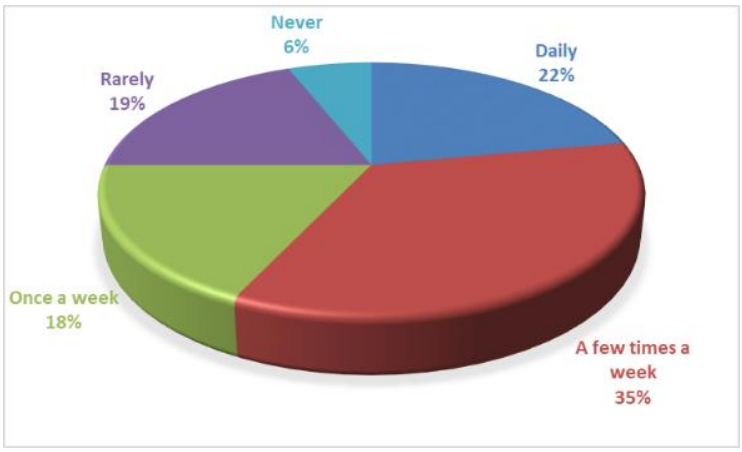


Figure 01

Frequency of Reading English-language Picture Books

The results suggest a generally positive engagement with English-language books, though with varying levels of consistency. The relatively high percentage of children reading English books at least several times a week indicates a proactive approach among parents in fostering early literacy. However, the combined percentages of those who rarely or never engage in this activity (25%) suggest that some families may face barriers, such as lack of access to books, limited parental proficiency in English, or competing priorities in language exposure.

Perceptions of Cultural Differences in English-language Books

As displayed in Figure 02, 64% of parents believe that English-language picture books contain cultural values that differ from Algerian values, while 12% do not perceive any cultural differences, and 24% are unsure.

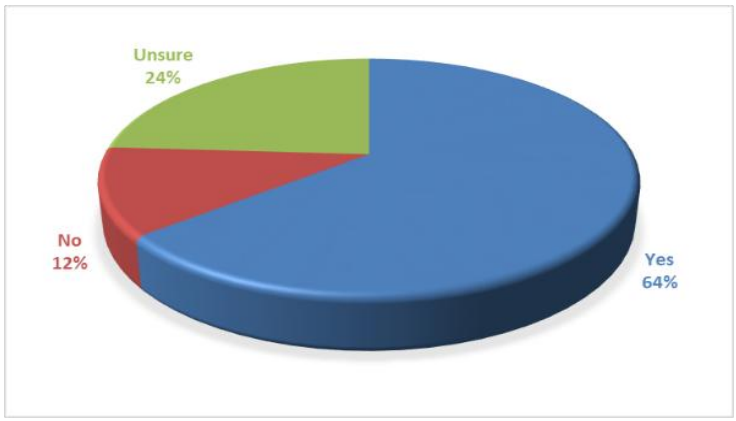


Figure 02

Perceptions of Cultural Differences in English-language Books

These findings reflect a heightened awareness among parents regarding the cultural content embedded in children's literature. The majority who acknowledged the existence of cultural differences suggests that English-language books are rather as carriers of specific values and worldviews. The remaining 24% who are unsure might not have actively analyzed the cultural elements of the books, either due to limited engagement or unconscious absorption of foreign cultural messages.

Awareness of Cultural Messages in English-language Books

Figure 03 reveals that 50% of the respondents described themselves as somewhat aware of the cultural messages conveyed in English-language books, while 28% considered themselves very aware; against 22% who stated that they are not aware at all.

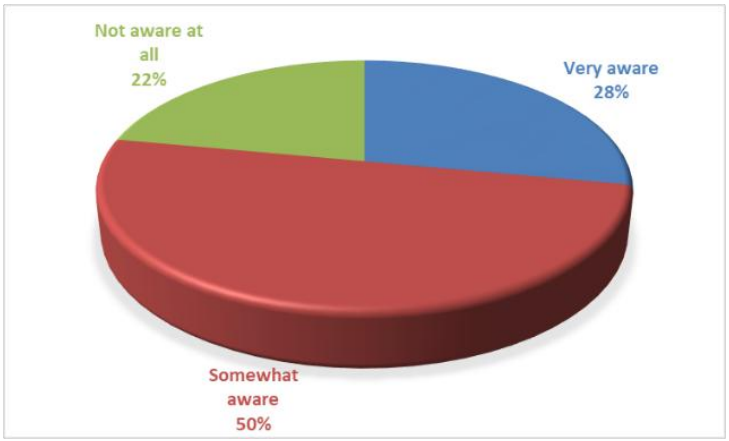


Figure 03

Awareness of Cultural Messages in English-language Books

This variation indicates differing levels of critical engagement with children's literature. While a majority exhibit at least some awareness, the existence of a sizable group (22%) who are not aware at all raises questions about implicit cultural transmission. Parents who are less aware may unintentionally expose their children to values that differ from their own without fully realizing their impact.

Importance of Exposure to both Algerian and Foreign Cultural Values

As presented in Figure 04, 71% of the participants believe that children should be exposed to both Algerian and foreign cultural values for cultural understanding. In contrast, 21% feel that Algerian values should be prioritized; against 8% who remained uncertain.

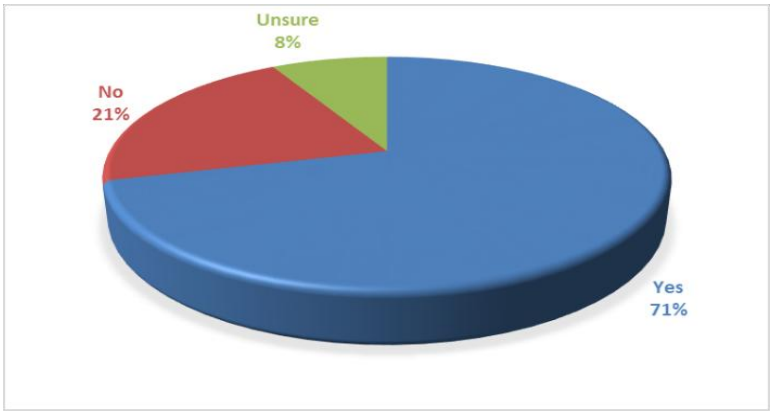


Figure 04

Importance of Exposure to both Algerian and Foreign Cultural Values

The predominance of support for cultural exposure suggests an openness among parents toward bilingual and bicultural experiences. This perspective aligns with the increasing recognition that children benefit from diverse cultural knowledge, fostering adaptability and intercultural competence. However, the 21% who advocate for prioritizing Algerian values highlight an ongoing concern about maintaining cultural identity amidst globalization.

Conflicts between English-Language Books and Algerian Values

Figure 05 Indicates that 49% of respondents have noticed specific cultural aspects in English-language books which they considered might conflict with Algerian values, whereas 28% have not; against 23% who were unsure.

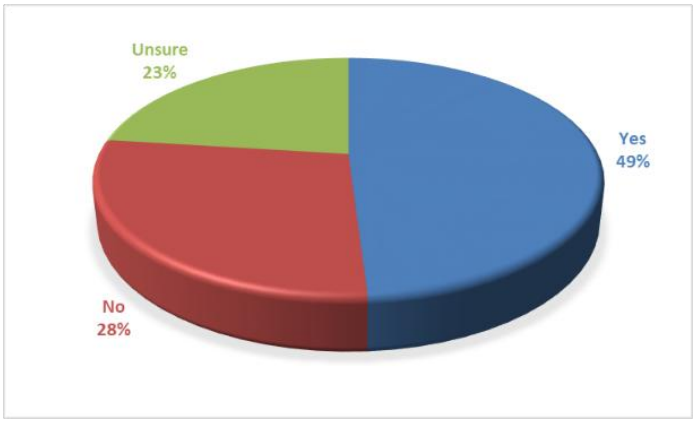


Figure 05

Conflicts between English-language Books and Algerian Values

This division suggests that cultural dissonance is a prevalent concern for many parents, though it is not universally perceived. The results indicate that while English-language books are widely used, they may sometimes introduce values that parents find unfamiliar or misaligned with their cultural norms. The 23% uncertainty rate may reflect a lack of close scrutiny or an acceptance of cultural differences without perceiving them as conflicts.

The Role of Literature in Shaping Identity and Worldview

Figures 06 illustrates that 56% of parents believe that literature plays a strong role in shaping their child's identity and worldview, while 34% perceive a moderate influence; against 10% who believe that literature has no influence.

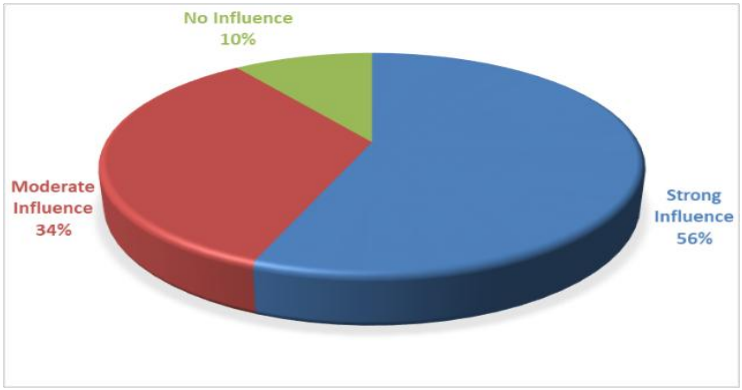


Figure 06

The Role of Literature in Shaping Identity and Worldview

These findings highlight a widespread recognition of the power of literature in early childhood development. The strong influence attributed to books suggests that parents view reading not only as a linguistic tool but also as a means of shaping their child's perception of the world. However, the 10% who see no influence may either view identity formation as more dependent on other factors (e.g., family, religion, social environment) or may not actively reflect on the ideological impact of books.

4.2. Interviews Findings

This section presents the findings of the interviews conducted with parents regarding their motivations for introducing English-language picture books to their children, their perspectives on cultural exposure, and their views on the impact of literature on their children's identity and worldview. The responses provide insights into the diverse attitudes towards bilingual and bicultural education, reflecting both enthusiasm for global exposure and concerns about preserving Algerian cultural values.

Motivations for Introducing English-Language Picture Books

The responses reveal a range of motivations behind parents' decisions to introduce English-language picture books and short stories to their children. The majority of parents (87.50%) emphasized the role of these books in enhancing language acquisition, particularly in an increasingly globalized world where English proficiency is seen as an asset for educational and professional opportunities. Many parents viewed these books as a means of expanding their children's linguistic competence beyond what is taught in school, fostering early bilingualism and increasing their exposure to authentic language use.

Beyond language learning, several parents (62.50%) highlighted the cultural exposure that English-language books provide. Some parents deliberately select books that introduce their children to different cultural settings, traditions, and perspectives, believing that such an exposure broadens their worldview and fosters intercultural awareness. However, while some parents (37.50%) acknowledged the presence of cultural messages within these books, others focused primarily on their linguistic benefits, paying little attention to their potential influence on cultural identity.

Perspectives on Cultural Exposure

When discussing the importance of exposing children to both Algerian and foreign cultural values, participants expressed diverse perspectives. Their views appeared to be influenced by factors such as educational background, personal experiences, and social environment.

Most participants (10 out of 16; 62.5%) expressed strong support for cultural exposure. They viewed it as beneficial for children's intellectual and social development, arguing that familiarity with different cultures can foster open-mindedness, adaptability, and a broader understanding of the world. For example, a university professor from Annaba emphasized the importance of developing intercultural competence in an increasingly globalized world and argued that children should be prepared to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Similarly, a father from Guelma who had previously studied abroad viewed bilingualism and cultural exposure as complementary to, rather than threatening to, Algerian identity. He believed that engagement with other cultures could broaden children's perspectives while deepening their appreciation of their own cultural heritage.

A second group of participants (4 out of 16; 25%) adopted a more cautious position. Although they acknowledged the educational and social benefits of cultural exposure, they stressed the importance of establishing a strong foundation in Algerian cultural and religious

values before introducing children to foreign influences. These participants expressed concern that excessive exposure to foreign cultures could weaken children's attachment to local traditions, language, and beliefs. One participant from Batna, a secondary school teacher, explained that while she encouraged her child to learn about other cultures, she made a conscious effort to ensure that Algerian traditions remained central to the child's upbringing.

A smaller group of participants (2 out of 16; 12.5%) expressed reservations about exposing children to foreign cultural values. They perceived certain aspects of foreign cultures as potentially conflicting with Algerian and Islamic traditions. One participant questioned the necessity of introducing foreign cultural perspectives at an early age, arguing that Algerian culture provides a sufficient foundation for children's moral and social development. Likewise, a mother from Khenchela emphasized the role of family and local community as the primary sources of cultural and moral guidance.

Overall, the findings indicate that participants generally recognized the potential benefits of cultural exposure but differed in how it should be introduced and managed. While many viewed exposure to other cultures as an important educational opportunity, others emphasized the need to preserve cultural continuity by ensuring that foreign influences complement rather than overshadow local values. A small minority remained hesitant about exposing children to foreign cultural perspectives because of perceived cultural and religious incompatibilities.

Literature's Role in Shaping Identity and Cultural Awareness

The participating parents held varying views on the extent to which English-language literature influences their children's identity, worldview, and sense of cultural belonging. Some parents (43.75%) expressed concerns that Western ideals, such as individualism, materialism, and differing family structures, presented in English-language books might create a disconnect between their children and their Algerian cultural identity. However, they believed that with proper parental guidance and reinforcement of local values at home, children could navigate these cultural differences effectively.

Conversely, other parents (37.50%) saw bilingual and bicultural exposure as an opportunity for their children to develop a broader, more informed perspective of the world. These parents argued that children could absorb aspects of both cultures while maintaining their Algerian identity. A participant noted that while children might struggle to deeply distinguish between cultural values, they can easily recognize differences, which serves as a starting point for comparing and understanding multiple cultural perspectives. This process, in turn, enhances their cultural consciousness and acceptance of diversity.

A smaller subset of parents (18.75%) believed that children lacked the cognitive ability to critically evaluate cultural values and that exposure to foreign literature might subtly influence their worldview. These parents emphasized the need to complement English-language books with materials that strongly reflect Algerian traditions to reinforce their children's cultural identity.

Perceptions of the Cultural Content in English-Language Picture Books

When discussing the cultural content of English-language picture books and short stories, the participating parents demonstrated a keen awareness of the potential differences between Western and Algerian values. While some parents prioritized the linguistic benefits of these books, others actively considered their cultural implications. Many parents (56.25%) acknowledged that English-language short stories frequently promote Western ideals, such as independence and individualism, which may not always align with Algerian values rooted in collectivism, family cohesion, and religious principles.

Some parents (43.75%) voiced concerns about portrayals of family structures, gender roles, and social norms that seemed inconsistent with Algerian traditions. For instance, stories that depict children openly challenging authority or promoting lifestyles unfamiliar to Algerian culture were viewed with skepticism. However, many parents addressed these concerns by engaging in discussions with their children to contextualize and explain cultural differences.

At the same time, half of the participants (50.00%) viewed the cultural content as an opportunity for fostering global awareness. They believed that exposure to different cultural norms did not necessarily lead to cultural erosion but instead encouraged critical thinking and adaptability. These parents tended to balance their children's reading materials by incorporating books that reflect Algerian culture alongside English-language literature.

Parental Approaches to Discussing Cultural Differences

The interviewed parents differed in how they approached discussions about cultural differences with their children. A majority of parents (62.50%) reported actively engaging in conversations to help their children understand the cultural context of the books they read. These discussions were often framed to encourage appreciation of cultural diversity while reinforcing Algerian traditions. Parents used everyday examples, religious teachings, and family customs to contextualize differences.

In contrast, 25.00% of parents adopted a more passive approach, believing that children would naturally absorb Algerian values through daily interactions without needing explicit discussions. These parents emphasized the importance of maintaining strong familial and community ties, trusting that these influences would outweigh any cultural messages encountered in books.

A smaller group of parents (12.50%) admitted they rarely, if ever, discussed cultural differences with their children, either because they did not perceive them as significant or because they assumed their children were too young to be affected. These parents tended to focus more on the educational and linguistic aspects of reading rather than cultural content.

Importance of Multicultural and Multilingual Exposure

The responses indicate that most parents (68.75%) appreciated exposing their children to multiple cultures and languages, viewing such exposure as beneficial for cognitive, linguistic, and social development. These parents believed that familiarity with diverse cultures could foster open-mindedness, intercultural awareness, and adaptability while still allowing children to maintain their Algerian identity.

However, 31.25% of parents expressed reservations and preferred to prioritize Algerian culture and values when selecting reading materials. Although they recognized the educational benefits of English-language books, they emphasized the importance of ensuring that multicultural exposure does not overshadow local traditions and cultural heritage.

The diversity of opinions reflects Algeria's complex sociocultural landscape, where tradition and modernity coexist, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes in tension.

4.3. Thematic Analysis of English Picture Books and Short Stories

As part of this research, a selection of English picture books and short stories available in Algeria was explored. This analysis aimed to examine the themes embedded in these narratives to assess their suitability for young readers (children and young adolescents), particularly in an Algerian and Muslim context. The selection included picture books and short stories for children found in libraries, bookstores, and online platforms accessible to

Algerian families. For this purpose, titles such as The Little Mermaid (Hans Christian Andersen, adapted editions), Cinderella (various retellings), Beauty and the Beast, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, and Frozen (Disney picture book adaptations), among others, were examined, as these works are widely circulated and readily accessible to Algerian parents and children. Given the increasing exposure of children to English-language literature, this examination is essential in understanding the cultural, moral, and ideological messages that these stories may convey. Rather than focusing on specific titles, the analysis centered on recurring themes and implicit messages to provide a broader understanding of the cultural and ideological content embedded in children's literature. This approach ensures that the findings are not limited to particular works but rather address widespread patterns, allowing for a more meaningful discussion of the potential impact on young readers. Additionally, ethical considerations were taken into account to avoid singling out or unfairly critiquing individual authors or publishers, as the intention is to encourage critical engagement with literature rather than censorship.

Representation of Polytheism and Mythological Elements

Several stories introduce characters inspired by mythological traditions, featuring gods associated with natural forces or human emotions, such as the god of fire, the god of the sea, and the god of love. These narratives often depict divine beings with human-like traits, engaging in conflicts, granting powers, or controlling destiny. While mythology is a significant part of literary heritage, the implicit promotion of polytheistic beliefs may not align with Islamic teachings, which emphasize monotheism. Such representations could lead young readers to perceive these fictional deities as comparable to real spiritual beliefs, necessitating careful guidance from parents and educators.

Magic and Sorcery as Problem-Solving Tools

A prevalent theme in many stories is the reliance on magic, sorcery, and supernatural forces to resolve conflicts or transform characters' lives. Witches, wizards, enchanted objects, and magical spells often serve as key elements driving the plot. In some narratives, protagonists turn to mystical beings for guidance, making bargains or using spells to achieve their goals. While fantasy can be an engaging genre, excessive emphasis on supernatural interventions may undermine the values of effort, resilience, and moral integrity. Islamic teachings discourage the trivialization of magic, as it can blur the line between harmless fiction and concepts that contradict religious beliefs.

Romanticized Love and Unrealistic Relationships

Many children's stories idealize romantic love, often portraying it as the ultimate goal or solution to personal struggles. Love at first sight, impulsive decisions based on attraction, and portrayals of affectionate behavior, such as public displays of affection, are common in these narratives. In some cases, female characters are depicted as passive figures waiting to be saved by a prince or hero, reinforcing outdated gender roles. The overemphasis on romantic relationships at an early age may shift children's focus away from values like self-development, family bonds, and personal ambitions. Parents and educators may wish to encourage a more balanced perspective on relationships, emphasizing friendship, respect, and emotional maturity over superficial romance.

Clothing and Modesty in Visual Representations

The content analysis revealed that some picture books portrayed characters wearing clothing styles that may differ from the cultural and religious norms commonly valued by many Algerian families. In particular, the attire of certain female characters reflected fashion styles that some parents might perceive as less consistent with traditional Algerian and

Islamic expectations regarding modesty. While such representations are often shaped by the cultural context in which the books are produced, they may be interpreted differently across societies.

From the perspective of several interviewed parents, repeated exposure to these visual representations has the potential to shape children's perceptions of appropriate dress, appearance, and self-presentation. These findings illustrate how seemingly neutral visual elements can convey cultural values and highlight the importance of considering cultural context when selecting children's literature. They also underscore the need for greater awareness of the diverse perspectives through which concepts such as modesty, identity, and social norms may be understood.

Individualism vs. Family and Community Values

Some narratives emphasize extreme individualism, where characters prioritize personal desires and ambitions over family bonds or community responsibilities. While self-expression and independence are important, certain stories promote rebellion against parental authority without consequences, portraying defiance as a sign of strength. In contrast, Islamic and Algerian cultural values emphasize a balance between individual growth and respect for family and social structures. Ensuring that children engage with stories that reinforce mutual respect, responsibility, and meaningful relationships can foster a more harmonious sense of identity.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how Algerian parents perceive the cultural values embedded in English-language picture books and short stories, and the extent to which they recognize potential conflicts with traditional Algerian cultural values. By employing a combined analysis of questionnaire, interviews, and content examination of selected picture books and short stories, the study sheds light on the intersection of bilingual education, cultural transmission, and parental awareness.

To begin with, the questionnaire findings indicate that most Algerian parents recognize the cognitive and linguistic benefits of exposing their children to English at an early age. Specifically, they perceive English as an essential tool for academic success and future professional opportunities, reflecting global trends linking English proficiency to social mobility (De Houwer, 2021; Bialystok, 2011).

However, despite this strong motivation for English-language acquisition, the findings reveal a varying degree of awareness regarding the cultural content of English-language picture books. On the one hand, some parents actively scrutinize book themes before introducing them to their children. On the other hand, others primarily focus on linguistic aspects, inadvertently overlooking the implicit values embedded in these narratives. Notably, cultural awareness was evident, as 64% of parents recognized cultural differences in these books, and nearly half (49%) identified conflicts with Algerian values. This reinforces previous research indicating that literature conveys implicit worldviews (Stephens, 1992).

Moreover, while 71% of parents supported intercultural exposure, 21% prioritized Algerian values, reflecting the ongoing tension between cultural preservation and global integration (Grosjean, 2020). Additionally, literature’s role in identity formation was acknowledged by 56% of parents, aligning with studies on narrative influence (Bruner, 1991). Nevertheless, 10% of respondents believed identity is shaped more by social interactions than by books (Gee, 2015).

Furthermore, interviews with parents further corroborate these findings, revealing varied attitudes toward cultural exposure through children's literature. More specifically, the interview findings provide deeper insights into the complex relationship between parental language practices, cultural identity, and language development in multilingual Algerian families. Many parents express concerns about certain themes, particularly those involving mythology, magic, and romantic relationships. These concerns stem from the fear that exposure to narratives featuring supernatural beings, spells, and non-Islamic spiritual beliefs may influence children's understanding of faith and worldview. This concern echoes similar issues raised in studies on children's literature in Islamic contexts (Zein & Setiawan, 2020). Additionally, parents highlight that picture books frequently depict romantic relationships in ways that may not align with traditional Algerian values. In particular, narratives that emphasize love at first sight or individualistic approaches to relationships contrast with the collectivist and family-centered values dominant in Algerian society (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

In addition to parental perspectives, the examination of English picture books and short stories available in Algeria reinforces these concerns. The analysis reveals a variety of cultural narratives, values, and implicit messages within children's literature. While many stories promote universal themes such as kindness, perseverance, and friendship, making them suitable for children worldwide, others include elements that may conflict with Algerian cultural and religious values. In particular, themes related to mythology, magic, and romantic relationships require careful consideration.

A key observation is that many widely available English-language books contain themes and character behaviors that, while common in Western storytelling traditions, may not align with the social and religious norms of Algerian Muslim families. For instance, books featuring mythological gods, magical transformations, and unrestricted expressions of romantic affection present ideological frameworks that differ from those commonly upheld in Algeria. Similar concerns have been raised in previous studies on children's literature, particularly in Islamic contexts, where scholars argue that exposure to polytheistic narratives may influence young readers' perceptions of spirituality and belief systems (Zein & Setiawan, 2020). While mythological stories can certainly be appreciated for their literary and historical significance, parents and educators may prefer to introduce them with appropriate contextualization.

Another significant theme emerging from the analysis is the frequent use of magic and sorcery as central plot devices. While magical elements are often viewed as sources of wonder and creativity, research has indicated that some parents from religious and culturally conservative backgrounds express concerns about their normalization in children's media (Al-Bulushi, 2019). Specifically, the portrayal of witches, spells, and enchanted objects, common in fairy tales, raises questions about how children internalize such concepts and whether they align with their cultural and religious worldview.

Likewise, many stories emphasize romantic love, often portraying love at first sight, with protagonists forming deep attachments based solely on physical appearance. Such portrayals align with previous research suggesting that traditional fairy tales often reinforce gender stereotypes and unrealistic expectations about relationships (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Since studies have shown that children's literature plays a crucial role in shaping identity and social norms, it is important to critically evaluate whether these portrayals promote healthy and realistic perspectives on relationships (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

Beyond themes of magic and romance, cultural representation is another critical area of examination. Notably, some books set in non-Western contexts depict characters and customs through a Westernized lens, sometimes perpetuating stereotypes or inaccuracies. This observation aligns with findings from studies on representation in children's literature, where researchers emphasize the importance of culturally authentic narratives that provide children with accurate and respectful portrayals of diverse communities (Bishop, 1990). Indeed, ensuring authentic representation in literature can help children develop a stronger sense of identity and belonging.

Thus, the study's findings confirm the proposed hypothesis that Algerian parents are aware of cultural differences in English-language picture books and perceive certain values and behaviors as conflicting with their traditional cultural values. However, it is important to note that the level of awareness varies significantly among parents, with some demonstrating critical engagement while others exhibit a more passive approach to content selection. These results align with previous research that emphasizes the role of parents and educators in guiding children's engagement with literature to ensure alignment with both linguistic and cultural objectives (Nikolajeva, 2014).

Implications for Parents and Educators in Balancing Bilingualism and Cultural Identity

No one can deny the importance of bilingualism, nor the significance of English as the international language. Language and culture are inseparable; they are two sides of the same coin, influencing and shaping one another. When it comes to young readers, however, it is crucial to distinguish between language as a component of identity and language as a tool for communication. Parents and educators should focus on fostering the second language as a means of communication rather than emphasizing native-like authenticity. English does not have to be tied exclusively to the culture of its native speakers. Instead, there are numerous English picture books and short stories that reflect Islamic values, such as tales about Ramadan, Hajj, and other cultural and religious themes. Stories featuring young girls in veils or narratives that celebrate family, generosity, and faith offer a meaningful way to integrate language learning with cultural preservation. In this regard, I strongly encourage writers to create stories in English that reflect our traditions and values. When children grow older and gain the wisdom to engage critically with diverse perspectives, they will be better equipped to explore more authentic literary texts from different cultures.

Introducing stories that are deeply rooted in our own cultural and religious practices is an essential step toward fostering a balanced bilingual identity. By selecting picture books that celebrate aspects of our faith; such as the significance of fasting during Ramadan, the spiritual journey of El-Hadj, or the importance of prayer; we offer children literature that aligns with both their language development and their cultural heritage. Stories that highlight the values of compassion, patience, family, and charity not only reinforce children's moral understanding but also create a meaningful connection between language and lived experience. Such literature can strengthen their sense of identity and belonging while simultaneously nurturing their cognitive and linguistic growth in a second language.

However, fostering bilingualism does not mean shielding children entirely from the culture and literature of the target language. Exposure to diverse cultures, including the Western world, is essential for cultivating intercultural understanding and empathy. The key lies in making intentional and thoughtful choices about the literature children engage with. When selecting English-language books, it is important to prioritize stories that uphold universal values, such as kindness, honesty and respect, while remaining mindful of content that might contradict core cultural or religious beliefs. This ensures that children can appreciate global perspectives without feeling alienated from their own cultural roots.

When selecting appropriate literature for young bilingual readers, several considerations should be taken into account. Books should be culturally relevant, reflecting the values of Algerian, Arab and Islamic traditions, such as strong family bonds, respect for elders, and the principles of hospitality and moral integrity. They should also be age-appropriate, ensuring that children can grasp the themes and messages without encountering complex or controversial topics prematurely. Moreover, books should offer positive representation, featuring characters who embody admirable traits such as generosity, perseverance, and honesty. Literature should not introduce ideas that conflict with foundational aspects of Islamic or Algerian culture, nor should it reinforce stereotypes that misrepresent these values. Instead, stories should serve as a bridge between the child's native culture and the target language, making the process of learning English both meaningful and contextually relevant.

By carefully curating the books children are exposed to, we can create an enriching bilingual experience that nurtures both linguistic proficiency and cultural identity. This approach allows children to engage with English in a way that feels natural and connected to their lives, rather than as a foreign or imposed element. It ensures that they acquire the cognitive benefits of bilingualism without experiencing cultural dissonance or alienation.

That said, this selective approach does not mean limiting children's exposure to Western literature but rather ensuring that their literary experiences remain in harmony with their values. Encouraging a balanced literary diet, where children read stories from different cultures while remaining grounded in their own heritage, enables them to develop a well-rounded worldview. By doing so, we can foster both language acquisition and cultural pride, allowing young bilingual readers to confidently navigate both their linguistic and cultural landscapes.

All in all, parents play a crucial role in guiding their children's literary choices and raising awareness about the implicit messages transmitted through language. Thoughtfully curating the content children consume allows them to benefit from bilingualism without compromising their cultural identity. A balanced approach to literature selection ensures that children develop both linguistic competence and cultural confidence, making their learning journey rich in meaning and relevance to their own lives.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of selecting English-language picture books and short stories that support bilingualism while preserving cultural and religious identity. While exposure to diverse cultures enriches children's learning, it is crucial to choose literature that aligns with local values and traditions. Authentic English books can play a valuable role in bilingual education, but they should be selected thoughtfully, balancing Western cultural influences with narratives that reflect Algerian heritage. Introducing English versions of Algerian folktales or stories rooted in Islamic traditions can offer meaningful alternatives that nurture both language skills and a strong sense of identity. By raising awareness among parents and educators, we can ensure that children benefit from bilingualism without cultural dissonance, empowering them to engage with multiple perspectives while remaining deeply connected to their roots.

Declarations

Use of AI: During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used AI-assisted technologies to improve the organization and clarity of the text. All suggestions were carefully reviewed and edited by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

Ethical Considerations: Participation in this study was voluntary. All participants gave their informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were respected throughout the research process.

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