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The portrayal of local and the international cultures in the Sudanese English Language Syllabus (Spine)

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Abstract - This paper explores issues related to the portrayal of the local culture as well as international culture in the English Language materials used in Sudanese schools. The researcher then, intends to venture into a thorough evaluation of the elements of different cultures in SPINE syllabus (Sudan Practical Integrated national English) series book 1to6. This study employs a set of checklist which has been used as a guideline to analyze the cultural aspects in a curriculum in order to examine English Language textbooks used in schools in Sudan. The findings show that there was insufficient incorporation of cultural aspects into the English materials. Many of the available cultural elements were presented at a superficial level and not discussed within the holistic cultural experience. The findings suggest that the absence and the lack of certain cultural aspects in the materials may be due to the fact some cultural topics are avoided fearing sensitivity, and that they may be implicitly portrayed through, for example, value integration, moral and educational emphasis. This study recommends that language learning materials must be able to present the language learners' own culture and all the cultures that surround them and the materials must be useful and effective both as English learning materials as well as a tool for promoting cultural knowledge and understanding among Sudanese students.

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Abstract - This paper explores issues related to the portrayal of the local culture as well as international culture in the English Language materials used in Sudanese schools. The researcher then, intends to venture into a thorough evaluation of the elements of different cultures in SPINE syllabus (Sudan Practical Integrated national English) series book 1to6. This study employs a set of checklist which has been used as a guideline to analyze the cultural aspects in a curriculum in order to examine English Language textbooks used in schools in Sudan. The findings show that there was insufficient incorporation of cultural aspects into the English materials. Many of the available cultural elements were presented at a superficial level and not discussed within the holistic cultural experience. The findings suggest that the absence and the lack of certain cultural aspects in the materials may be due to the fact some cultural topics are avoided fearing sensitivity, and that they may be implicitly portrayed through, for example, value integration, moral and educational emphasis. This study recommends that language learning materials must be able to present the language learners' own culture and all the cultures that surround them and the materials must be useful and effective both as English learning materials as well as a tool for promoting cultural knowledge and understanding among Sudanese students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culture in second-foreign language course is not an expendable fifth skill, it is always in the background right from day one ready to manifest and unsettled the good learners. In an article on discourse, for example, Brown (1994) questions whether or not language may be value-free or independent of cultural background. Culture in second-foreign course reflects an axiom in second-and foreign-language (L2 and FL) pedagogy, but it remains unclear to many L2 and FL educators just how this has come to be the case and what impact this has on their classroom practice paring in mind the fact that English has been adopted and transformed by communities all over the world to fit into local customs and local cultures. Consider a case of two speakers from the same ethnic converse in English, what is important that they share or negotiate norms of use together, not that they have adopted a specifically British or American set of norms. If English

language learners don't assume that there are fixed cultural 'rules' about expressing themselves in English, but instead learn that these patterns of use may vary widely across English users, they will be open to learning 'culture' more deeply. Here is where cultural syllabus can help students become 'pragmatically flexible' as part of their global cultural competence. The major theorists and researchers in multicultural education agree that the movement is designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world. Multicultural education, as its major architects have conceived it during the last decade, is not an ethnic- or gender-specific movement. It is a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world. Another harmful misconception about multicultural education has been repeated so often by its critics that many people take it as self-evident. This misconception is based partly on questionable assumptions about the nature of Sudan society and partly on a mistaken understanding of multicultural education. The claim that multicultural education will divide the nation assumes that the nation is already united. While we are one nation politically, sociologically our nation is deeply divided along lines of race, gender, and class. Society and the schools tried to create unity by assimilating students from diverse racial and ethnic groups into a mythical culture Sudanese that required them to experience a process of self-alienation. In the language education of today, the teaching of multiculturalism plays an essential role. The main objective of multiculturalism is to increase pupils' awareness of foreign cultures and to teach them, for example, about equality, human dignity, and human rights, In addition, internationalisation and the unification of their country i.e. Sudan and the Sudanese people. This referred to as the true challenges of language education. A multicultural Sudan Should be visualised not only as a possibility but rather as a probability for which language education should prepare all comprehensive school pupils. (John. 2001) argues that the highest objective of foreign language education is "to let and give a learner a chance to grow beyond the boundaries that are set to him/her by his/her own

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mother tongue and native culture". More than before, pupils' attention in foreign language lessons is to be drawn to international matters such as co-operation between nations and their citizens and to peaceful coexistence of all people irrespective of their backgrounds. Pupils should be encouraged to keep an open mind towards those who may look, think, or sound different from them. As a school subject, English language should be considered by school teachers as an excellent opportunity to familiarise their pupils with foreign countries, cultures, and people. Because of the nature of the subject, teachers can introduce their pupils, alongside with the target language itself, the geographical, cultural, and social contexts in which the target language is actually spoken. This, in turn, will increase Sudanese pupils' awareness and understanding of the target language as a natural means of communication for people speaking the language as their mother tongue (the target language community) and, also, provide them with a more extensive view on the nature of the language. By acquainting pupils with a diversity of contexts that interact with the target language, for example the target language speakers and their ethnic backgrounds, teachers may be able to motivate their pupils more in language lessons and also to convey them a greater appreciation of foreign cultures and people.

II. THE SCHOOL PROGRAMME (SPINE)

In the early 1990s, a new series was introduced. That was the **SPINE** series, **SPINE** stands for 'Sudan Practical Integrated National English'. This series was designed by a number of Sudanese experts helped by some experts who are native speakers of English and who helped in the designing and editing of the series. The series is composed of 6 books; 3 for the Basic Level and 3 for the Secondary Level. **SPINE** is the current course now and it has been in use since 1992. **SPINE** series was written with a different learner profile in mind. It was written in the early 1990s by authors who belonged to the traditional methods of teaching and syllabus design. They are not to blame for that. What they did was the state-of-the-art in those days. The paper also stressed the importance of viewing the issue in a new frame of mind; one that is not biased by stereotyped thinking. It argued for a multicultural approach to the syllabus design. An approach that take on board all possible hypotheses and assumptions and tries to search for answer that are based on vital data which, in themselves, are the result of solid facts and not just personal opinions or feelings.

III. STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEM

There are various materials for English language teaching and learning that can be obtained in the market and from other various sources. Obviously, there are different cultural elements presented in most of the current English learning materials. However, one can

argue whether they are sufficient and comprehensive enough to tap on the culture of the English language learners. As known to the world, Sudan is a multiracial and multicultural country. It is rich of cultural practices and traditions of many cultural communities. Therefore, the materials will not be able to present these cultural practices and traditions of all cultural communities that exist in this country. The English materials available also may not provide enough cultural information to the teachers in order for them to fully utilize cultural aspects that can enhance the learning of English among the learners. This is important especially when the English teacher does not really belong to the learners' community that he or she is teaching. How can a teacher teach a language to a group of learners without understanding the cultures that surround them and when language teaching must be incorporated with cultural elements? Let us take a situation for instance. So the moral of the story is clear that the presence of local cultural elements in the English materials (Spine) is important not just for English language learners but also for English language teachers. Although we live in a multiracial and multicultural society, the local and international mass media are still discussing racial misunderstanding and polarization in segments of our society. All the discussions of the sensitive issues are made worse when the international community interferes. As a result, all the impressions of harmony and peacefulness presented through the cultural elements in the English materials do not really hit the target. This happens when the learners are exposed to negative perceptions and at the same time, those can be negative stimulations toward learning English. Since Sudan is a multiracial and multicultural country, its stability and social cohesion are so much depending on harmony, understanding and tolerance among all members in all communities. Without these elements, then such word like 'harmony' is impossible to be possessed. A social community needs to have the respect to other social communities so that an impressive multiracial and multicultural country still exists on this planet. In summary, in order to understand the problems better, one can ask the following questions:

1. How relevant are cultural aspects in the Sudan?
2. How can English language teaching be more effective in Sudan?
3. Have the materials sufficiently incorporated the cultural aspects?
4. Are the available cultural aspects useful and effective in order to be used as English learning materials and as tool for understanding cultures?

The answers to the questions allow us to see the major role of the English language materials in incorporating the cultural aspects. They also inform us on the status of the English language syllabus, its materials and the teaching.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine the degree that the English language materials provide the wholeness of experiences of ethnic and cultural groups in Sudan;
2. To examine the extent that the materials present the ideals and realities of Sudan societies;
3. To discover the way the materials support ethnic and cultural diversity in Sudan;
4. To ascertain the degree that the materials offer opportunities for participation in aesthetic ethnic and cultural experiences;
5. To find out the degree that the materials present the culture of the native speakers of English (C2) and make use of the learners' first language (L1).

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The textbook is the main source of teaching in many subjects. Many modern textbooks strive to give students at least a superficial knowledge base for understanding other cultures and people. The study on local cultural aspects presented in the English language materials is necessary for the reason that Sudan is a multiracial and multicultural country. The learners' social background factors need to be taken into teachers' serious consideration. This study will enable to guide materials developers or textbook writers to identify proper cultural elements to be integrated into the materials. Besides that, this study is important for English language teachers who need to fully utilize cultural aspects in order to enhance the learning process of the language. The English materials that they are using may not provide sufficient information on those aspects. This will, at the same time, bring difficulties to the teachers in order to link the cultural background of learners and English language learning. With the exposure to such matters and issues in this study, English teachers in Sudanese schools will have the awareness of the importance of culture in any second language classrooms. The study also provides better understanding for English language teaching (ELT) practitioners as it links the teaching of English to broader but more important cultural dimension. There is a tendency among practitioners to confine ELT within the teaching of structures or grammar, neglecting its communicative aspects. Also learner factors and the differing needs as well as their sociocultural are overlooked. Besides, the study also offers policy makers or curriculum planners' useful insight into the area of teaching culture across the curriculum. We need to participate in the global society and curriculum can be a useful tool to impart cultural knowledge and skills.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The analysis of this study would be based on a set of textbooks used by Basic and secondary schools (Spine). The quantity and quality of the materials in the

textbooks examined would depend on many factors, such as the limitations posed by the Curriculum Specifications designed by the Ministry of Education as well as the requirement by the publishers. The description of the cultural aspects in the textbooks depends on the selected criteria in the checklist used in this study. There are other aspects in Banks' checklist as well as from other scholars. Those aspects may not have been examined.

Another limitation is due to the fact that cultural aspects can be implicitly portrayed. The cultural aspects were also sometimes presented in different forms such as value integration and moral education. It was thus difficult to identify or describe the aspect within the scope of this study.

VII. METHODOLOGY

a) *Research Instruments*

This study utilizes a checklist adapted from Banks' (2001) checklist for multicultural curriculum to examine Form 1 to Form 6 English textbooks (Spine). Here are the questions adapted from the checklist which was used to evaluate the English materials:- The checklist was adapted to fit the focus of this study. Banks' checklist was designed for the evaluation of multicultural curriculum. It has broader scope of inquiry and much more comprehensive criteria. Since the focus in this study is on the English language material within the context of second language learning (ESL materials), only relevant items from the checklist were selected to be used. The following criteria were taken into consideration when identifying and adapting Banks' guidelines for this study:

- In English language materials, cultural elements must be linked to the linguistic items intended for teaching.
- Integration of both culture and language has to translate into manageable content for classroom procedures.
- In Sudan national English language curriculum, multiculturalism may not be explicitly stated or it may appear in different forms, such as value integration, moral emphasis, and broader educational emphasis.
- Multiculturalism may entail some sensitive issues that are sometimes avoided in public discussions.

VIII. DISCUSSION

a) *Participation of the Whole Cultural Experiences*

According to Banks (2001), a multicultural curriculum must make the learners understand the wholeness of experiences of ethnics and cultural groups. Based on the findings, all the textbooks do not include the study of societal problems experienced by some ethnics and cultural group members that live in the same environment. The diversity is hardly even mentioned. Issues like racism, prejudice, discrimination,

and exploitation are serious issues which have never been touched in the textbooks. Banks (2001) really emphasizes the presence of these aspects in all multicultural syllabuses. It will help learners to understand the wholeness of the experiences of all the cultural groups around them. When all these aspects are portrayed in the English materials (Spine), Sudanese ESL learners will become freer to express their ideas and perceptions toward what is really happening in their environment. Just let them view and interpret the situations or problems in their own beliefs and principles. Therefore, biasness towards certain cultural groups in this country does not exist. Living in this multiracial and multicultural country, they need to be open-minded in accepting the existence of other cultural groups in their big community. It will also help them to understand the roles of other cultural groups in the environment. The absence of these aspects in our English textbooks means all of these benefits are being ignored. Our students do not have the chances to understand the wholeness of experiences of ethnics and cultural groups in Sudan and at the same time to see the beauty of it. The findings also prove that the study of historical experiences, cultural patterns, and social problems of ethnics and cultural groups are not sufficiently included in the English Language Textbooks (Spine). There is an exposure of few festivals like, Christmas, Ramadan, Eidilfitri are given as the examples of festivals in Sudan. However, there is no information given about those festivals. There are many other festivals are not given any due attention. These festivals really reflect the cultural events practiced by few out of many other ethnics in Sudan. This is somehow, the only ethnics' cultural distinctiveness in Sudan portrayed in the Spine books. This shows that only positive experience and cultural patterns of ethnics are portrayed in the textbooks (Spine). The appearance of group members from different ethnics in books is just made nothing more than to represent some of the main ethnicities that really exist in our community. These findings however prove that the portrayal of historical experiences, cultural patterns, and social problems of ethnicities and cultural groups in the English Language materials are insufficient. At the same time it can be concluded that Sudanese ESL learners do not really understand what is really happening in their living and learning environment since it has never been a topic to be freely discussed with their English teachers in schools. This is for the reason that the textbooks used in their schools never include the study of historical experiences, cultural patterns and social problems of ethnicities and cultural groups in the country. In all Spine English Language Textbooks, nothing of any ethnic in Sudan is judged as positive or negative. Students can only see the distinctiveness through the characters' names and the way the characters are illustrated such as their costumes. This brings us to one conclusion that Sudanese ESL learners are never given the chance to

make interpretation and comparisons among ethnics that exist in the environment they live in. One easy example can be taken as one case which really happens in our community now and it can discuss to enlighten our students about what's happening in the society. The problematic issues, which are social and societal problems, can be discussed in terms of the reasons of its existence, reason why they have been illegalized, and its implication on our multicultural environment. Let the students have some ideas of what is positive and what is negative in all what they witness in their everyday lives. They need to be given the chance to think freely using their own criticality and perceptions towards all the cultural issues that exist in their environment. This is also why Banks (2001) views this aspect is important to be portrayed in ELT materials.

IX. PRESENTATION OF IDEALS AND REALITIES

Banks (2001) also emphasizes that a multicultural curriculum must be able to help students identify and understand the ever-present conflict between ideals and realities in human societies. None of the textbooks exposes anything related to value conflicts that ever happened in this multicultural society. Different ethnics sometimes have opposite values which may create conflicts among each other. Sudanese learners are not given the chance to identify and understand this phenomenon. Worse than that, they do not have the chance to have any idea about the conflict of values around them. Every culture consists of various good values. Sudanese students deserve to agree or disagree to whatever values they perceive. A lot of lessons can be learnt through values. Therefore, it is a disappointment to say that students are never taught to identify and understand any value conflict that exists in their environment. It is quite obvious that many ideal situations are being presented in the textbooks rather than the realities. Thus, students are not equipped with the exposure and awareness towards what is really happening in the society they are living in. Not even one case is found in the English Language textbooks (Spine). A few cases do appear in the English Language textbooks (Spine), but those cases do not really answer the question of the checklist. In textbooks (Spine), there is a revelation on the reality where our green heritage is being destroyed by men. There are also some pictures of men planting trees and criticisms toward men's irresponsibility in preserving the nature. This is the only reality exposed in the textbook, which is not enough in order to instill students with the consciousness about what is really happening in the environment they live in. This case, though, has nothing to do with ethnics and cultural groups. In textbooks (Spine), there is a revelation on the reality of some cases like dumping and draining toxic and domestic waste into the river. These cases however reveal the reality done by all human

beings as one big group of community instead of by specific ethnic groups. This happens in order to avoid discrimination to ethnics in the community. Issues like racism and religion are not once being mentioned. In textbook, children of Down's and Dyslexia syndromes are not exposed. Conditions that happen to a Down's syndrome child are never viewed racially. Their races are never mentioned and no discrimination is given to them because they do not deserve to be ignored. All Sudanese are given the equal treatment since Sudan is considered as one big multicultural community. No racial or religious emphasis is portrayed in the textbook in order to avoid diversity among Sudan, yet to maintain the unity.

X. SUPPORT TOWARDS DIVERSITY

A multicultural curriculum must also support ethnic and cultural diversity through promoting values, attitudes and behaviours. The study has found that all English textbooks contain quite a lot of values, attitudes and behaviours that support ethnic and cultural diversity. However, the appearance of this aspect in the textbooks is only in terms of the illustration of the characters in the textbooks. In the English textbook, there are some evidences that supports this statement. It is in terms of the graphic illustration of the characters in the textbook. Few Muslim characters in the textbooks are illustrated as wearing jalabia with imam and girls with scarf. This illustration also shows students that Muslim girls have distinctive appearance from girls of other cultural groups. This also means that the textbook at the same time promotes values, attitudes and behaviours of some cultural groups in the society by putting a little emphasis on letting students to examine differences within and among ethnics and cultural groups. In the English Language textbook, there are some values, attitudes and behaviours promoted in the textbook but none of them support ethnic and cultural diversity. Still, the only value that is related to racial issue is that the one portrayed through the graphical illustration and characters in the textbook, where each group of friends consists of members from different races and ethnics. This is can be seen that there is no discrimination towards races and religions in schools in Sudan. In the English Language textbooks, a lot about Sudanese culture is presented through the graphical illustration of the characters. They could actually promote the tourism of Sudan and at the same time promoting the beautiful various cultures of people called Sudanese. The lack of emphasis towards cultural distinctiveness in the materials makes the value, attitudes and behaviour embedded in every ethnic and culture hardly to be seen by learners. Values, attitudes and behaviours shown through the illustration of characters may be insufficient in order to instill cultural awareness among the students. Besides, the illustration, the distinctiveness can also be seen through the names of the characters. Well, how much cultural awareness

will be able to be provided for them through only the characters? Students do not have the opportunities to examine the differences within and among ethnics and cultural groups. The diversity that students have in the community is not seen anymore.

XI. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION IN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

Banks (2001) also highlights the importance of students' participation in the aesthetic experiences of various ethnic and cultural groups to be present in a multicultural curriculum. In the English Language textbooks (Spine), there is no Literature segment is given. Students do not have real opportunities to read of poems, short stories and essays. No literature of any cultural groups is given any kind of attention. Obviously, students' exposures towards literature of foreign culture as well as the exposure towards their own culture and other cultures are not given any attention. In his Multicultural Curriculum checklist, Banks (2001) also states that students must be provided with opportunities to develop full literacy in at least two languages. This means Sudanese ESL learners need to be taught about the culture of the native speakers of English. Based on the findings, students, of English as second language learners, are not exposed at all to the culture of the native speakers of English. There are not Literature segments which use English, short stories and folklores.

XII. PRESENTATION OF TARGET CULTURE AND USE OF L1

It is also important that a multicultural curriculum to be able to teach ESL students through their native languages. In textbooks (Spine), there is the presence of a few Arabic words. This, though, does not show that English is taught to Sudanese students using their first language (L1). It is just the translation of the same instruction in English to Arabic language. English is never taught to students using their native language (L1). There is no even a word of any language other than English exists in the textbooks. Banks (2001) puts a very significant emphasis on the presence of local as well as world cultural aspects in all multicultural syllabuses. Based on the findings, the lack of local cultural aspects portrayed in the English Language Materials used in all schools in Sudan shows that English language syllabus in our education system cannot be described as a multicultural syllabus.

XIII. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the portrayal of local cultural aspects in English Language Materials used in this country with a beautiful gift of multiracial and multicultural community. This paper has made use of a set of checklist from Banks (2001) as the guideline to analyze the local cultural aspects portrayed through English Language textbooks (Spine) used in schools in

Sudan, As mentioned earlier in the introduction part of this paper, this study has set out to ascertain the aspects of local culture that are reflected in the English language materials used in this multiracial and multicultural country. Based on the findings of the research, these following conclusions can be drawn:-

1. There is insufficient portrayal of cultural aspects in the English Language Textbooks used in all secondary schools in Sudan. There is a lack of exposure to all the local ethnicities and cultures available around the learners in their living and learning environment through the English Language Textbooks provided by their schools.
2. Cultural aspects were not evenly presented in all the themes or chapters throughout the textbooks of the English Language Textbooks.
3. There was lack of exposure to and portrayal of local cultural aspects in the materials in the textbooks.
4. Local languages or the learners' first languages were not highlighted throughout the materials, suggesting their insufficient contribution to English language learning. The result of this study indicates that Sudanese curriculum developers and materials writers have not fully utilized culture in language materials, generally, and second language learning, specifically. There are some aspects that need to be taken into consideration before selecting global materials. All the aspects stated are obviously related to learners' culture and environment. One point that has captured my agreement is the author's awareness towards cultural sensitivity in the learners' environment. Global materials are often likely to ignore the learners' local cultural aspects. There are, of course, a lot of things in our culture here in Sudan that are different from other cultures especially the English ones. For instance, a man and a woman living together before marriage is out of our culture and of course will be an embarrassing thing to discuss about it openly especially to be presented in the English language materials. The same thing goes to some other issues like homosexual, illegitimate children, virginity loss before marriage, gambling and drinking which are viewed as very sensitive or impolite to be openly discussed in our culture. (Dat, 2006) *"Course books need to repair such misconceptions by allowing characters to demonstrate more diversity in appearances, behaviours, viewpoints and personalities."* (Dat, 2006) As Dubin (1992: 17) highlights, writers should create characters who appear to be real people with recognizable ages, traits, backgrounds, among other features. When the characters are illustrated in a different way and look weird, communication becomes flawed and context loses its significance (Dat, 2006). Characters in the materials, in fact, must be illustrated and presented the same as how they are in the real life. Therefore, it is important that all illustration of characters in the English Language Materials to be parallel to or at least not too far to be different from the characters that

exist in all the cultures in students' environment in order to let them find the learning is more meaningful.

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