Cultural Representations in Indian English Language Teaching Textbooks

Author:
Bose, P; Gao, X

Cultural Representations in Indian English Language Teaching Textbooks

Priyanka Bose[1] 🄳 and Xuesong Gao[1] 🄳

Abstract

Culture plays an integral role in English language teaching (ELT) and is the reading components of ELT textbooks. This study explores the issue of cultural representation in ELT textbooks in India, which has received little attention in ELT research world-wide. By incorporating 10 ELT textbooks from four states, one national board from India, and a sequential mixed-method design, this research is aimed at investigating the cultural representation of the textbook content, characteristics of people in terms of race, gender and nationality, and the depth of the cultural content. While the results have revealed a general domination of cultural representations originating from Britain, including a major proportion of British, Irish, and generally White characters, a significant amount of gender bias, and overall minimal in-depth cultural engagement, there exists wide regional variations. Language teachers may adapt cultural representations that are relevant with other pedagogical resources to engage English language learners in critical pursuits.

Keywords

culture, English language teaching (ELT), textbooks, India, mixed-method

Introduction

The English language can be taught through a set of cultures that form "a social construct, the product of self and others' perceptions" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 3). Engagement with such cultural representations is a crucial part of English language teaching (ELT), as promoting cultural understanding is one of the most significant objectives of language teaching (Byram, 2008). As "textbooks play a pivotal role in the success of language education" (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 695), they are instrumental for English language teachers to engage with cultural representations in language teaching practices. Richards (1998) suggested that ELT textbooks function as a base upon which teachers, with their knowledge and skills, can evaluate and modify materials, if required, Derakhshan (2021); Hu et al. (2021); Li et al. (2021). Baker (2011) and Nault (2006) argued that the teaching of culture, through ELT textbooks, should be integral to four critical functions (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of ELT. For this reason, researchers have often engaged with cultural representations in English language teaching textbooks (Davidson & Liu, 2020; Derakhshan, 2021; Thumvichit, 2018; Weninger & Kiss, 2013).

India is the second-largest English-speaking country in the world following the United States of America (USA). English is regarded as a critical language that enables Indians to compete in a globalized world. It is also seen as a means of empowerment and employment for disenfranchised Indian communities (Bhattacharya, 2017b). However, very little is known about how cultural representations are addressed in ELT textbooks in India.

Background

Cultural representations in ELT textbooks have been analyzed in countries other than India (Awayed-Bishara & Muzna, 2015; Davidson & Liu, 2020; Derakhshan, 2021; Song, 2013). One framework for realizing such analyses is the Cortazzi and Jin (1999) framework, which classifies ELT textbooks under three categories: (i) target language culture (used by speakers whose first language is English); (ii) local/source culture (a learner's own culture); and (iii) international culture (various other cultures around the world). Generally, a balanced representation of all cultural materials is warranted since a variety of other cultural representations of English helps learners to compare their own cultural/life experiences with other cultural groups, and also to become aware of their behaviors, expectations, perspectives, and values to develop intercultural awareness (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

---

[1]University of New South Wales, Liverpool, Australia

Corresponding Author:
Priyanka Bose, Department of Education, University of New South Wales, G45 Morven Brown Building, NSW 2052, Australia.
Email: p.bose@student.unsw.edu.au

Researchers have also argued the importance of the depth of cultural representations in ELT textbooks. Song (2013) proposed three levels of cultural representation: (i) superficial interaction; (ii) hybridization; and (iii) critical reflection with increasing depth. Superficial interaction refers to the inclusion of a description or conversation on physical and cultural objects, such as travel, food, clothing, and festivals. Hybridization refers to the development of a new culture through the combination or fusion of two or more different cultural traditions, customs, and values. For example, the Maharaja MacBurger (Indian + American), replaces beef in the Big Mac with lamb/chicken. Critical reflections involve an in-depth discussion of cultural concepts, histories, relationships, and values, or conflicts that interact, for example, evidence of British colonialism by textbook characters in Indian ELT textbooks.

Cultural materials in ELT textbooks from many nations have tended to show an overrepresentation of cultures from either colonizing nations or other nations wielding colonizer-like levels of power, such as the United States (Hermawan & Lia, 2012; Song, 2013; Taylor-Mendes, 2009; Thumvichit, 2018). If a postcolonial theoretical framework were to be pursued, there would be an expectation of continued domination of colonial norms long after the exit of the colonizer in postcolonial nations such as India: "Moreover, the remains of an empire affect the formerly colonized countries . . ." (Burney, 2012, p. 174). Thus, "inner circle" (Shin et al., 2011, p. 254) countries, such as Great Britain, may be expected to be better represented than other countries in ELT textbooks of such nations (Shin et al., 2011). White characters may also be better represented since "chromatism" and the "politics of color" (Burney, 2012, p. 180) persist in countries like India, with white skin color being considered superior to other colors (Burney, 2012; Dos Santos & Windle, 2021). A polar opposite of such overrepresentation of a colonizer's culture is the force of nativism, which has been identified as making inroads into Indian textbooks in the last few decades (Hasan, 2002). Nativism asserts the right and identity of the local people. It promotes antipathy of anything foreign (Friedman, 1967), as described by the postcolonial scholar, Burney (2012) ". . . the theory that desires the return to a simple precolonial existence where the indigenous culture flourished" (p. 191). In India, a final social force that cannot be ignored is sexism stemming from historical patriarchal norms, with the underrepresentation of female characters in ELT textbooks (Bhattacharya, 2017a).

Therefore, it may be significant to explore whether these forces are evidenced within cultural representations in Indian ELT textbooks. The topic is of interest to the lay media, such as a discussion on politically driven changes to specific textbooks (Jain, 2017). Within the broader academic literature from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, representing three South Asian countries that share many cultural characteristics, researchers have engaged specific cultural issues pertinent to South Asia. For instance, Bhattacharya (2017a) and

Islam and Asadullah (2018) identified evidence of sexism in Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi ELT textbooks, respectively, with a preponderance of male characters in the textbooks. Other research from Pakistan and India have focused on textbook content related to religious tolerance (Ghazi et al., 2011) or terrorism (Ide, 2017). While shedding light on focused issues such as sexism or terrorism is essential, a broad-brush analysis of racism and other cultural forces in textbooks can support the understanding of social forces that shape textbooks and pedagogical approaches required to manage any bias (Shin et al., 2011). Only one study from South Asia has provided a broad-brush overview of cultural materials in ELT textbooks, that is, in Bangladesh, where it was identified that 26% was sourced from culture materials, 22% from international sources, and 36% emanated from local and international cultural materials (Siddiqie, 2011). In addition, one other study has explored cultural representations in Indian ELT textbooks, namely, the study on sexism by Bhattacharya (2017a), as discussed earlier. Thus, a significant research gap exists in this area, with no study exploring cultural forces in Indian ELT textbooks through a broad-brush analysis.

Research Question

To address this critical gap, we hereby explore cultural representations in ELT textbooks from various regions of India. In doing this, we are cognized that the Indian context is not homogeneous because different states possess different histories and experiences. Thus, our inquiry addressed the following question:

> How are cultural representations (described below) distributed in Indian ELT textbooks?

While there can be several different ways of representing and interpreting culture in ELT textbooks (Weninger & Kiss, 2013), firstly, we were specifically interested in how cultural representations of target, local/source, and international cultures (as defined earlier) are distributed in the content of stories, poems and essays of Senior Secondary ELT textbooks in India. Secondly, we wanted to unravel how cultural representations of race, age, gender, nationality, and culture (target, source, or international cultures) of characters/persons were distributed in these books. Finally, we were interested in knowing if these textbooks had a significant representation of high-level cultural interactions, which was another pertinent cultural issue described by Song (2013). The goal of this study is three-fold: (i) to provide a broad-brush overview of cultural representations over a large sample of Indian ELT textbooks; (ii) to determine which descriptive studies are best equipped to do so; and (iii) to discuss potential reasons for these representations. Therefore, it is not our goal to delve deep into the discourse of these textbooks and to interpret through a theoretical lens, which methods such as

critical discourse analyses are best equipped to do. We also recognize that while there is an argument that culture should not be quantified and enumerated (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 699), a broad-brush overview, such as this research, is best achieved using quantitative analyses. We address some of these criticisms in the limitations section.

Methodology

With the above goal in mind, the study evaluated the distribution of cultural content, and the levels of intercultural interaction in Indian ELT textbooks with the help of the framework designed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999), as described earlier (Hamad et al., 2016). This study utilized a sequential exploratory mixed-method design to code collected qualitative data from text preceding quantitative analyses (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 38–40). Greenstein (2006) described the sequential mixed method design as a sequential combination of qualitative data collection and/or analysis followed by quantitative data collection and/or analysis or vice versa (quantitative followed by qualitative). In this study, qualitative information was quantitatively coded using content analysis, a method where text content was systematically coded into limited categories (Stemler, 2001).

The inquiry involved a sample of 10 Indian ELT textbooks used by Senior Secondary classes (Years 11–12), including two used by the national board, namely the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and eight by four state boards from West Bengal, Gujarat, Punjab, and Kerala. Figure 1 shows the location of the states in India represented in this sample.

All schools affiliated with CBSE follow the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) curriculum and utilize textbooks published by NCERT. National board textbooks utilized by CBSE affiliated schools will be referred to as NCERT textbooks henceforward. At this juncture, it is also important to note that education boards in India, unlike in the USA or Canada, do not denote local or school-level organizations. Instead, education boards in India represent large national or province/state-level organizations with broad-ranging powers, including the selection of textbooks. For the remainder of this paper, the term "board" indicates these education boards. While a large percentage of schools use state board textbooks within their states (e.g., West Bengal), national board (NCERT) books are used throughout India by many schools affiliated with CBSE. Certain states in India that do not have their own textbooks also use NCERT books as state board ELT textbooks (e.g., Haryana).

In the analysis, each story, poem, or essay in the textbooks was coded as belonging to one of the three cultures, namely source, target or international. While details of the coding process are provided in Appendix 1, a short overview of the process is explained here. Like previous researchers, only the reading material of the texts was coded,

that is, exercises and images were not coded, although images may have helped to support the coding process. Coding was performed based on the setting and cultural content of the texts (story, poem or drama) (e.g., *Kite Flying*: Indian/source culture) and by the author/poet and characters in the text (e.g., play *The Browning Version* by Terence Rattigan, as a target culture). Next, further analysis was conducted to identify race/gender/nationality representations from each of the three cultures. While we were cognizant of the fact that race is a social rather than a biological construct (Gannon, 2016), we followed earlier conventions (Song, 2013; Taylor-Mendes, 2009) and definitions from the United States Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) to divide race into five categories: Asian, South Asian, White, Black, and Other, for instance, mixed-race (refer to Supplemental Appendix for details). Although the South Asian race is a subset of the Asian group, it was distinguished to highlight and separately enumerate their appearance in the textbooks. In the analysis, race was determined through the cultural ethnicity of the author, as well as the content of the text and supporting illustrations. Gender and nationality were determined by the name of the character or name of the author if the author was identified (Supplemental Appendix 1). Characters that could not be coded into nationalities (e.g., animals in the story *The Monkey and the Crocodile*) were coded into the N/A (not applicable) category. A discussion of inter-coder agreement, trustworthiness, and dependability is provided in Supplemental Appendix 1.

Results were reported in terms of total percentages based on the enumeration of coded categories across textbooks for each board, with tables displaying percentage distributions; results for individual textbooks are not shown. Results for individual textbooks are not presented because this paper is aimed at identifying and describing cultural representations in textbooks across regions rather than within regions of India.

Informed by Song (2013) the analysis also identifies themes and levels of cultural interaction in textbooks. The percentage distribution of the levels of inter-cultural interaction in each textbook and all textbooks in total were calculated, in addition to summaries for each state. The proportion of combined critical reflection and hybridization instances relative to superficial interaction were compared using graphs, with one graph providing 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the difference in percentages. Additionally, an inferential chi-squared test at $p < .05$ (Cohen et al., 2018) was implemented. This test was implemented for individual states and in total for all of India. While a significant difference would imply that one form of cultural interaction dominated, a non-significant result where the percentage difference and its 95% CI encompassed zero suggests similar levels of critical/hybridization and superficial interaction instances. This test evaluated that if desirable forms of cultural material (critical reflection/hybridization) were present in significant proportions.
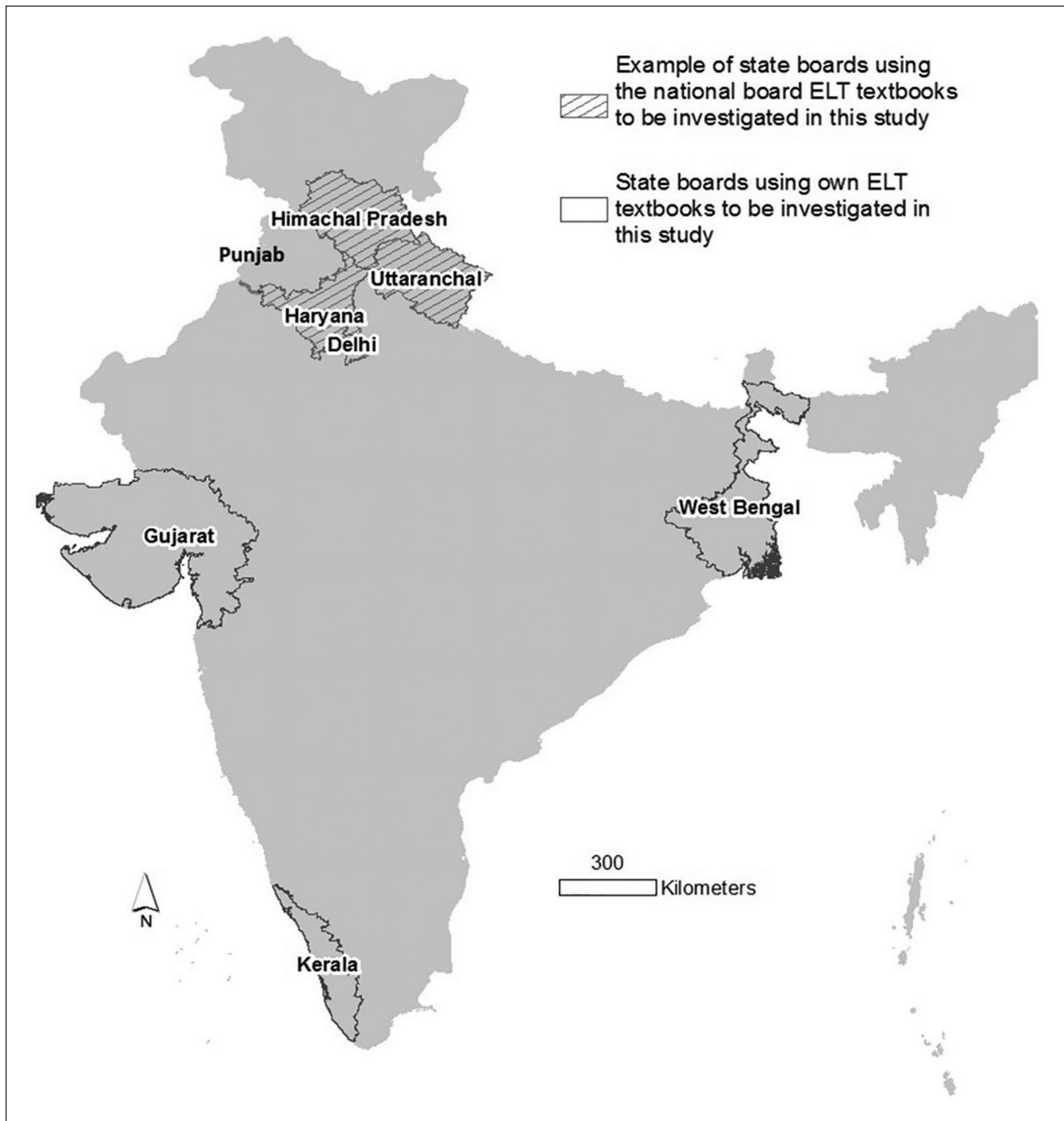
Figure 1. States in India from which ELT textbook samples are drawn.

At this point, it is essential to describe our positionality in this research. The first author (responsible for the coding and interpretation process) has both an insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspective. The first author originates from an Indian non-native speaker (NNS) background and has been exposed to a variety of the English language (due to her higher education in India, Canada, and Australia), teaching methods, and cultural contexts. The first author was educated through studying ELT textbooks from the West Bengal Board and is familiar with NCERT ELT textbooks, thus being highly placed to code the cultural content of textbooks within their context. The other author has an East Asian background and provides a diverse etic perspective to this research.

Table 1. Number and Percentage Distribution of Three Types of Cultural Content in Indian ELT Textbooks.

State board/National board textbooks	International (%)	Local/Source (%)	Target (%)	N/A (%)	Total (%)
NCERT	7 (27)	6 (23)	11 (42)	2 (8)	26 (100)
Gujarat Board	3 (6)	17 (36)	26 (55)	1 (2)	47 (100)
Kerala Board	4 (11)	11 (31)	19 (54)	1 (3)	35 (100)
Punjab Board	5 (14)	13 (37)	16 (46)	1 (3)	35 (100)
West Bengal Board	7 (41)	3 (18)	7 (41)	0 (0)	17 (100)
Total	26 (16)	50 (31)	79 (49)	5 (3)	160 (100)

Note. NCERT = National Council of Educational Research and Training; N/A = not applicable.

Table 2. Race and Gender Distribution of Characters in Indian ELT Textbooks.

State board/National board textbooks	Race				Gender	
	White (%)	South Asian (%)	Others* (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	N/A (%)
NCERT	45 (46)	32 (33)	13 (13)	74 (76)	19 (19)	5 (5)
Gujarat Board	68 (56)	46 (38)	2 (2)	72 (60)	43 (36)	6 (5)
Kerala Board	65 (59)	34 (31)	3 (3)	66 (60)	38 (35)	6 (5)
Punjab Board	43 (49)	27 (31)	11 (13)	61 (70)	20 (23)	6 (7)
West Bengal Board	37 (90)	3 (7)	0 (0)	30 (73)	10 (24)	1 (2)
Grand total	258 (56)	142 (31)	29 (6)	303 (66)	130 (28)	24 (5)

Note. NCERT = National Council of Educational Research and Training; N/A = not applicable.
*The "Other" category consists of people who are Asian (not South Asian), Black, mixed-race, or people who could not be categorized into any racial categories.

Results

Emerging from the analysis, we identified a dominance of target culture genre content (49%) in the textbooks (Table 1). Target culture-related content included Western themes, such as Christmas, Christian beliefs, and Black slavery in the USA. Gujarat and Kerala are Indian states with the highest percentage of target culture content in textbooks (55%–54%, respectively). The highest amount of target cultural content in any given textbook was also from Gujarat (64%). In contrast, source cultural content comprises of 31% of all content in the surveyed textbooks. Most selected states were close to that fraction (31% to 37%), apart from West Bengal (18%) and NCERT textbooks (23%).

A Gujarat textbook had the highest amount of source cultural content (44%). Prevalent themes included cultural content related to Indian food, tradition, and customs, such as the Kite Flying Festival in Gujarat, and socioeconomic and political conditions of Indians during the British rule. Among all the textbooks, the category with the lowest representation was international cultures (16%), with significant variations from different states. For example, textbooks from West Bengal had the highest instances of international cultural content (41%) followed by NCERT textbooks (27%). In comparison, textbooks from Gujarat had the lowest percentage (6%).

In addition to analyzing the types of cultural content in textbooks, the investigation of the race and gender of textbook characters showed interesting variations. It was identified that the White racial group was dominant (56%) in 10 textbooks, followed by South Asian (31%) (Table 2). Due to the low percentage of Asian people who were not from South Asia, people belonging to the Black racial category, mixed-race, or those who could not be categorized into any other racial category (6%) were grouped into the "Other" category. From all the textbooks examined among the Indian states, West Bengal had the highest percentage of people from the White racial group (90%), including characters from target and international cultures. The distribution of South Asians in West Bengal textbooks was negligible (7%), which was lower than those in other states.

On the other hand, Gujarat showed the highest distribution of the South Asian racial group (38%). Regarding gender representations, male characters were dominant in all surveyed textbooks (66%) compared to female characters (28%). The NCERT textbooks had the lowest percentage of female characters (19%) compared to textbooks from various states (23%–36%).

Further to examining the race and gender of textbook characters, the characters demonstrated significant variations in terms of culture and nationality. As shown in Table 3, the textbooks had the highest percentage of characters from target cultures (44%), followed by local/source (31%). Among the target culture groups, the largest or most dominant nationality group was British/Irish (28%), followed by American/Canadian (16%).

Table 3. Nationality and cultural distribution of characters in Indian ELT textbooks.

State board/ National board textbooks	Indian (%)	British/Irish (%)	USA/Canada (%)	N/A (%)	International (%)	Local/Source (%)	Target (%)	N/A (%)
NCERT	34 (35)	20 (20)	7 (7)	11 (11)	26 (27)	34 (35)	27 (28)	11 (11)
Gujarat	46 (38)	43 (36)	20 (17)	6 (5)	6 (5)	47 (39)	62 (51)	6 (5)
Kerala	31 (28)	31 (28)	25 (23)	8 (7)	13 (12)	31 (28)	56 (51)	10 (9)
Punjab	28 (32)	10 (11)	21 (24)	6 (7)	22 (25)	28 (32)	31 (36)	6 (7)
WB	3 (7)	24 (57)	0 (0)	1 (2)	13 (32)	3 (7)	24 (59)	1 (2)
Total	142 (31)	128 (28)	73 (16)	32 (7)	80 (18)	143 (31)	200 (44)	34 (7)

Note. NCERT = National Council of Educational Research and Training; N/A = not applicable; USA = United States of America.
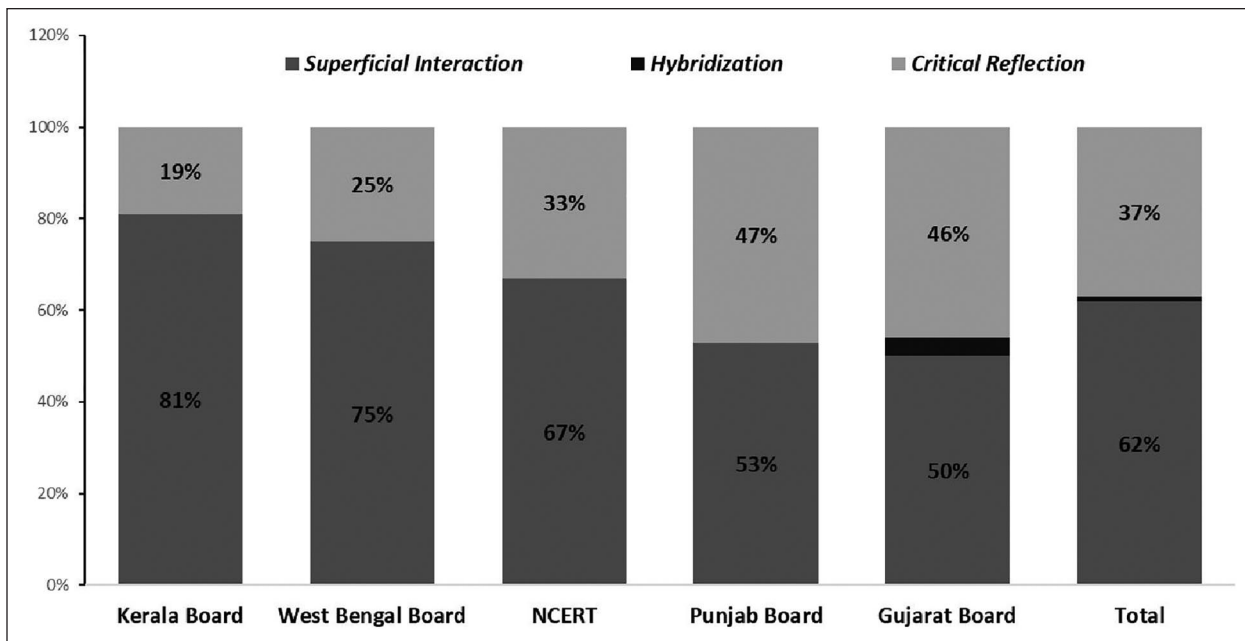
Figure 2. Percentage distribution of superficial, hybridization and critical reflection themes in Indian ELT Textbooks.

Overall, Indians formed the most common nationality group (31%). There was variation in the percentage of Indian characters, that is, one NCERT textbook (not shown) having a near majority of Indians (46%). Textbooks from Gujarat displayed an overall dominance of Indian characters, even though they did not form a majority (38%). In contrast, the lowest percentage of Indians was found in West Bengal ELT textbooks (7%).

West Bengal is very much an outlier since, while all other Indian textbooks had some representation of American/Canadian characters among the target group, the target group in West Bengal texts comprised of British/Irish characters (57%). Overall, 18% of all characters in Indian ELT textbooks were categorized as "international," with West Bengal having the highest number of characters (32%) and Gujarat having the lowest number (5%). West Bengal textbooks also

had the second-highest number of target culture characters (59%), following Gujarat.

Most of the cultural themes in textbooks (Figure 2) were connected with superficial interaction (62%), while a small number of themes related to critical reflection (37%) and hybridization (1%—representing negligible instances of hybridization). The analysis noted that Kerala textbooks had the highest proportion of cultural themes on superficial interaction (81%), while Gujarat board textbooks had the lowest proportion (50%). Punjab and Gujarat board textbooks reported the highest percentage of critical reflection themes (46%–47%). Thus, Kerala, West Bengal and NCERT textbooks, along with the overall total, showed a significant percentage of superficial cultural interactions relative to critical reflection content.

Figure 3 illustrates the difference between the percentage of superficial interaction content and critical reflection/
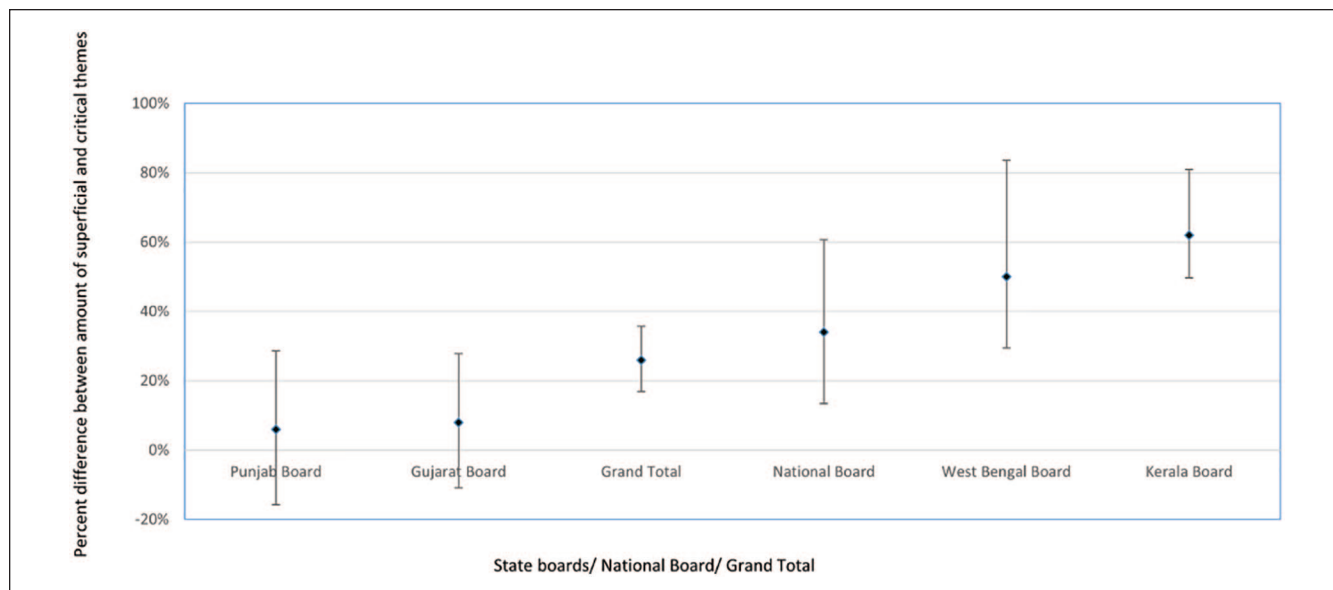
Figure 3. Percentage difference between percent of superficial interaction instances and percent of critical reflection instances in Indian ELT textbooks with 95% CI: Differences, whose confidence intervals do not encompass zero are significant.
Note. Hybridization is not mentioned here since all states except Gujarat had zero instances of hybridization. In case of Gujarat, the percent difference is between the sum of hybridization and critical reflection versus, superficial interaction.

hybridization content in each state board, as well as India as a whole, with 95% CI. Kerala, West Bengal and NCERT textbooks, along with the overall total, showed a significant percentage of superficial interaction content relative to critical reflection content. Chi-squared tests were used to test the difference in percentage, and this difference was found to be significant ($p < .05$). In Gujarat and Punjab textbooks, the percentage of critical reflection/hybridization content was not significantly different from the percentage of superficial interaction content with a non-significant chi-squared statistic. The difference in percentages between the two types of content in Gujarat and Punjab textbooks were 6% (−17%, 28%) and 8% (−12%, 27%), respectively (Figure 3).

Discussion

Overall, British and Irish characters (28%) appear almost as frequently as Indian characters (31%). The state with the longest association with the colonizing experience was West Bengal, which had the highest percentage (and a full majority) of White characters. In addition, West Bengal had the lowest percentage of source culture content and South Asian characters. Indian textbooks were also white-dominated (56%), with South Asians at a distant 31%. Burney (2012) identified this disparity as ". . .residues and results of the aftermath of colonialism are still evident in Western cultural imperialism and Eurocentrism" (p. 174). In countries without a history of British colonization, the default dominating force of American culture prevails, with American cultural representations being most prevalent, such as that shown in the research by Hermawan and Lia (2012) and Song (2013).

Opposing forces of globalization, immigration and nativism, along with historic patriarchal norms, are also visible in Indian ELT textbooks. The state of West Bengal showed a large fraction of international content in its textbooks and an equally large number of international cultural characters. This may have been influenced by the history of early globalization in this state, but relatively low levels of recent immigration.

In contrast, Punjab, with a large diaspora in North America, had significantly more North American characters than British or Irish. The highest proportion of Indian characters and the second-highest percentage of source cultural content was visible in the textbooks of Gujarat, a state with a long history of nativist politics (Mehta & Mehta, 2010). Nevertheless, NCERT textbooks, with books used in schools throughout India, have played a part in balancing the distribution of cultures and characters to some extent.

However, NCERT textbooks suffer from a serious bias, which also persists in other Indian ELT textbooks. All textbooks are dominated by male characters (60%–76%). NCERT textbooks have the worst bias with less than a quarter of female characters being presented. This bias has also been documented in ELT books from India's South Asian neighbors, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Since NCERT textbooks are used by a multitude of state boards in India and by a number of CBSE affiliated schools and other schools in India, such bias in these textbooks can pose a serious problem. Bhattacharya (2017b) postulated that men are seen as the dominant ruling class throughout India's history, even though the Indian government has taken measures to promote gender equality in

education, as recorded in the 1986 National Policy of Education (NPE) where it is emphasized that all types of discrimination against gender be eliminated. However, women are still represented as a marginalized class, as evident in Indian ELT textbooks (Bhattacharya, 2017b; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019). In addition, very few characters represent children or senior people, and transgender characters do not exist in any textbook.

The NCERT (2006) position paper opened with the statement, "English is in India today a symbol of people's aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant" (p. 1). Our research suggests that NCERT's assertion is true to some extent. At least in NCERT's textbooks, the colonial origins of English were less evident, and a greater balance in the distribution of cultural materials was noticed than in other Indian ELT textbooks. At the other end of the spectrum, agreeing with the research of Bhattacharya (2017b), colonial origins were strong and alive in West Bengal textbooks. Also, the NCERTs statement does not hold for all Indian textbooks; a colonial hangover is quite evident. The statement about colonial origins of English being "forgotten" (p. 1) and "irrelevant" (p. 1) is an overstatement (Bhattacharya, 2017b; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019). Moreover, despite the emphasis on "participation" (p. 1) of the people in the NCERT position statement, gender bias presenting in NCERT textbooks does not encourage equitable participation from India's population (Bhattacharya, 2017b; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019).

In terms of the depth of cultural interaction, textbooks of two state boards (Kerala and West Bengal) and the national board (NCERT) displayed significantly more superficial interaction themes than critical reflection themes (as evidenced through statistical testing). Weighed in by these three boards, overall, significantly more superficial interaction themes are present in Indian textbooks than critical reflection. It is difficult to speculate what caused Kerala and West Bengal state boards to show similar patterns, but one reason may stem from sociopolitical similarities of the two states (Bhog et al., 2010; Devika, 2008).

In the case of hybridization, Song (2013) found many instances of hybridization in South Korean textbooks, possibly due to deliberate attempts at injecting cultural diversity to promote cultural awareness (Song, 2013). Such instances of hybridization in Indian ELT textbooks were infrequent; only one instance was found with minimal evidence of British and Indian culture hybridization. While it is difficult to speculate why this is the case, it may be related to the notion of "binaries" (Burney, 2012, p. 178) proposed by postcolonial theorists. This notion implies that colonizing forces often emphasized the differences between them and colonized people, which resulted in many undesirable outcomes, including a lack of cultural mixing and the discouraging of intermarriage from fear of miscegenation (Burney, 2012, p. 191).

Like previous studies, this study has its limitations, particularly when the text was coded into categories. While thematic coding is a well-established research methodology, it remains that coding is a subjective process, and different individuals may have different interpretations (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Some researchers have challenged the very notion of coding cultures into discrete categories (McConachy, 2018). While such arguments have validity, it is difficult to explain the overwhelming preponderance of certain races, cultures, and genders found in some textbooks as an error generated from an inaccurate interpretation of meaning.

In addition, arguments against cultural enumerations are bound by discipline. While the language disciplines have started to argue against the enumeration of cultures (McConachy, 2018; Weninger & Kiss, 2013), often drawing on their evidence from qualitative studies; researchers outside the languages discipline but within the scientific discipline have recently embraced the quantitative coding of cultures, for instance, current research using "big data" approaches have found patterns of racism and sexism in history textbooks in the USA (Lucy et al., 2020).

Another critique is that cultures cannot be viewed as unique and monolithic. Therefore, there can be no Indian or Japanese culture, but they should be viewed as a mix of many cultures due to globalization and cross-cultural interactions (Ishikawa & McBride, 2019). Paradoxically, unless boundaries are defined between what comprises one culture and what comprises the "other," it is impossible to measure where these boundaries disappear and what comprises cultural mixing or hybridization in the first place (Song, 2013). Hence, clear demarcations of boundaries in cultural representations are necessary for the sake of convenience, as evident in the three levels of language policy categorized by Shao and Gao (2019).

Despite these limitations, this study is essential because it is the first rigorous investigation into the cultural content of ELT textbooks in India and should be of great benefit for researchers and policymakers from India and South Asia. This study should also be of interest to researchers outside India since these methods could be replicated in other countries in the Global South to investigate cultural representations in ELT textbooks.

Future Recommendations

There are multiple opportunities and areas for future work. In this study, single characteristics (such as race, White or gender-male) were enumerated. However, the interaction of characteristics was not enumerated, such as the number or percentage of white males. This remains an avenue for future research. A sample of 10 ELT textbooks from four states in India was chosen for our analysis, which was partly a sample of convenience. Future studies can replicate this study in other states with additional textbooks. Note that the textbooks are just one medium of ELT instruction. Other

educational resources, such as lecture notes, multimedia and images can also play an essential role in the process. Investigating these resources in the Indian ELT context could provide avenues for further research. While this research has provided a broad-brush quantitative overview of cultural content, a deeper semiotic analysis of Indian ELT textbooks that investigates the images in these textbooks and their cultural appropriateness related to the text is warranted and should be actively pursued by Indian or South Asian ELT textbook researchers (Derakhshan, 2021).

Finally, there is a complete dearth of literature on the effect of cultural materials being distributed in a particular manner in textbooks on student learning and the retention of the English language. Ideally, randomized community/control trials should be conducted to tease out the effect of different distributions on English language learning. However, this has not been done, and until this is done, no concrete suggestion can be made regarding the "ideal" distribution of cultural materials in ELT textbooks.

Pedagogical Implications

Several policy and pedagogical implications have emanated from our research. Firstly, a greater balance between international, target, and source cultures, different races, and sexes would be desirable in Indian ELT textbooks. Secondly, target cultural materials have to be diversified out of the Anglo-Irish context. Shin et al. (2011) suggested recognizing English as an International Language (EIL). In today's globalized world, there is a need to recognize the diversity of contexts of English-language use. Therefore, policymakers need to incorporate this diversity into current ELT textbooks.

While current shortcomings in Indian ELT textbooks, such as limited in-depth intercultural representations, are unlikely to go away soon, teachers in India may be able to provide some support, for example, inviting guest speakers from target or international cultures or incorporating multimedia and online videos in the teaching curricula to increase the depth of student perspectives, all determined by the school's funding and budget. Teachers may also use one of the many instances of source cultural occurrences found in textbooks as an opportunity to encourage students into discussing their own cultures to broaden cultural discussions on customs and cultures from different parts of India, bearing in mind that many Indian classrooms are now diverse with students from multiple states and regions of India. The discussion can move beyond India with the help of the resources discussed above. Thus, teachers need to develop what Song (2013) calls a "critical cultural and linguistic consciousness" (p. 389), or an attitude of questioning and active intervention, rather than the acceptance of textbook materials (Sifakis et al., 2018).

To rectify the underrepresentation of cultural hybridization in Indian ELT textbooks, textbook creators need to include text with cultural mixing/interaction, as the South Koreans have done (Song, 2013). One such instance is the Indo-American *Maharaja MacBurger* discussed earlier. Alternatively, teachers may wish to incorporate additional materials to engage students in critical and in-depth discussions on various cross-cultural issues to help them become cross-culturally and critically aware.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) claimed that learners may overcome problems of cultural discrepancy through knowledge and cultural awareness. Such knowledge in the Indian context may come from ELT textbooks and teaching. Therefore, textbook writers and teachers play a pivotal role. Moreover, teachers and students share the same source culture (Indian culture), and therefore, teachers are in a perfect position to understand the student's point of view. Having said that, the content of Indian ELT textbooks is also from various other cultures (target, international) in addition to the source culture. This poses a problem for teachers who may have to go above and beyond their own target culture to match the target culture of learning, therefore, they need to adopt ethnographic stances, such as embracing various viewpoints to develop a broader perspective and cognizing the cultural concepts from a virtual insider position in the specific culture, as well as embracing explicit teaching, such as describing and modeling a cultural concept through various techniques, such as visual, auditory and motivating students through various teaching methods, for example, questioning and testing the student's understanding (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Conclusion

The distribution of the cultural content of 10 Indian ELT textbooks was evaluated and discussed in this study within the context of various cultural forces in India and abroad. This study has demonstrated the overall domination of the target culture (White, preferably British/Irish) in Indian ELT textbooks. Evidence of the forces of postcolonialism, globalization, patriarchy and nativist politics were found in the textbooks.

While the evaluated textbooks have indicated varying degrees of gender bias, the NCERT textbooks contain a reasonable cultural balance among all other textbooks. Furthermore, the majority of cultural interactions in Indian ELT textbooks remain at a superficial level. It was suggested that textbook creators and teachers need to develop an ethnographic stance that would lead to cultural awareness among students. It has been further suggested that a higher number of instances of hybridization and critical reflection be incorporated. This study is unique in that it is the first study of cultural content distribution in Indian ELT textbooks, therefore, it is hoped that this study will facilitate textbook writers, teachers and learners to develop an inclusive globalized outlook with the help of EIL, instead of generating cultural bias or inequality.

ORCID iDs

Priyanka Bose iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4395-4499
Xuesong Gao iD https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3426-8721

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

Awayed-Bishara, & Muzna, J. (2015). Analyzing the cultural content of materials used for teaching English to high school speakers of Arabic in Israel. *Discourse & Society*, *26*(5), 517–542.

Baker, W. (2011). Intercultural awareness: Modelling an understanding of cultures in intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *11*(3), 197–214.

Bhattacharya, S. (2017a). Gender representations in English textbooks used in grade eight under national and state boards, India. *Language in India*, *17*(6), 410–432.

Bhattacharya, U. (2017b). Colonization and English ideologies in India: A language policy perspective. *Language Policy*, *16*(1), 1–21.

Bhog, D., Mullick, D., Bharadwaj, P., & Sharma, J. (2010). *Textbook regimes: A feminist critique of nation and identity*. Nirantar.

Burney, S. (2012). Conceptual frameworks in postcolonial theory: Applications for educational critique. *Counterpoints*, *417*, 173–193.

Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: Essays and reflections* (*Vol. 17*). Multilingual Matters.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.

Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1999). Cultural mirrors: Materials and methods in the EFL classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning (Vol. The Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series* (pp. 196–219). Cambridge University Press.

Davidson, R., & Liu, Y. (2020). Reaching the world outside: Cultural representation and perceptions of global citizenship in Japanese elementary school English textbooks. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, *33*(1), 32–49.

Derakhshan, A. (2021). 'Should textbook images be merely decorative?': Cultural representations in the Iranian EFL national textbook from the semiotic approach perspective. *Language Teaching Research*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168821992264

Devika, J. (2008). Memory's fatal lure: The left, the Congress and 'Jeevan' in Kerala. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *43*(30), 13–16.

Dos Santos, G. N., & Windle, J. (2021). The nexus of race and class in ELT: From interaction orders to orders of being. *Applied Linguistics*, *42*(3), 473–491.

Friedman, N. L. (1967). Nativism. *Phylon*, *28*(4), 408–415.

Gannon, M. (2016). Race is a social construct, scientists argue. *Scientific American*, *5*, 1–11.

Ghazi, S. R., Shahzada, G., Khan, I., Shabbir, M. N., & Shah, M. T. (2011). Content analysis of textbooks of social and Pakistan studies for religious tolerance in Pakistan. *Asian Social Science*, *7*(5), 145.

Greenstein, T. N. (2006). *Methods of family research* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Hamad, E. O., Savundranayagam, M. Y., Holmes, J. D., Kinsella, E. A., & Johnson, A. M. (2016). Toward a mixed-methods research approach to content analysis in the digital age: the combined content-analysis model and its applications to health care Twitter feeds. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *18*(3), e60.

Hasan, M. (2002). Textbooks and imagined history: The BJP's intellectual agenda. *India International Centre Quarterly*, *29*(1), 75–90.

Hermawan, B., & Lia, N. (2012). Traces of cultures in English textbooks for primary education. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *1*(2), 49–61.

Hu, J., Gao, X., & Qiu, X. (2021). Lexical coverage and readability of science textbooks for English-Medium instruction secondary schools in Hong Kong. *SAGE Open*, *11*(1), 215824402110018. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211001867

Ide, T. (2017). Terrorism in the textbook: A comparative analysis of terrorism discourses in Germany, India, Kenya and the United States based on school textbooks. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *30*(1), 44–66.

Ishikawa, T., & McBride, P. (2019). Doing justice to ELF in ELT: Comments on Toh (2016). *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, *8*(2), 333–345.

Islam, K. M. M., & Asadullah, M. N. (2018). Gender stereotypes and education: A comparative content analysis of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi school textbooks. *PLoS One*, *13*(1), e0190807.

Jain, S. (2017). *Rajasthan textbooks revised to glorify Modi government*. The Wire.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Li, J., Gao, X., & Cui, X. (2021). Language teachers as materials developers. *RELC Journal*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211061627

Lucy, L., Demszky, D., Bromley, P., & Jurafsky, D. (2020). Content analysis of textbooks via natural language processing: Findings on gender, race, and ethnicity in Texas US history textbooks. *AERA Open*, *6*(3), 2332858420940312.

McConachy, T. (2018). Critically engaging with cultural representations in foreign language textbooks. *Intercultural Education*, *29*(1), 77–88.

Mehta, N., & Mehta, M. G. (2010). Gujarat beyond Gandhi: Notes on identity, conflict and society. *South Asian History and Culture*, *1*(4), 467–479.

Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2019). *National policy on education 1986*. https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/nep/Policy_1986_eng.pdf

Nault, D. (2006). Going global: Rethinking culture teaching in ELT contexts. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, *19*(3), 314–328.

NCERT. (2006). *National focus group on the teaching of English: Position paper on the teaching of English*. https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/focus-group/english.pdf

Richards, J. C. (1998). Textbooks: Help or hindrance in teaching? In J. C. Richards (Ed.), *Beyond training: Perspectives on language teacher education* (pp. 125–140). Cambridge University Press.

Shao, Q., & Gao, X. A. (2019). Methods and approaches in language policy research. In J. McKinley & H. Rose (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 253–263). Routledge.

Shin, J., Eslami, Z. R., & Chen, W.-C. (2011). Presentation of local and international culture in current international English-language teaching textbooks. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, *24*(3), 253–268.

Siddiqie, S. A. (2011). Intercultural exposure through English language teaching: An analysis of an English language textbook in Bangladesh. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, *15*(2), 109–127.

Sifakis, N. C., Lopriore, L., Dewey, M., Bayyurt, Y., Vettorel, P., Cavalheiro, L., Siqueira, D. S. P., & Kordia, S. (2018). ELF-awareness in ELT: Bringing together theory and practice. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, *7*(1), 155–209.

Song, H. (2013). Deconstruction of cultural dominance in Korean EFL textbooks. *Intercultural Education*, *24*(4), 382–390.

Stemler, S. (2001). An overview of content analysis. *Journal of Practical Assessment, Research Evaluation*, *7*(17), 137–146.

Taylor-Mendes, C. (2009). Construction of racial stereotypes in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks: Images as discourse. In R. Kubota & A. M. Lin (Eds.), *Race, Culture, and Identities in Second Language Education* (pp. 74–90). Routledge.

Thumvichit, A. (2018). Cultural presentation in Thai secondary school ELT coursebooks: An analysis from intercultural perspectives. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, *6*(11), 99–112.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *Race*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/note/US/RHI625219#:~:text=OMB%20requires%20that%20race%20data,report%20more%20than%20one%20race

Weninger, C., & Kiss, T. (2013). Culture in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks: A semiotic approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, *47*(4), 694–716.