RELEVANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS TO TURKISH LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN ANTALYA

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Abstract – *This study explores to what extent Turkish learners of English identify with the orientation of cultural content of English language textbooks used in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The study took place at a Teacher Training High School in Antalya, a Mediterranean city and capital of the Antalya province. The participants were 10th and 11th grade English and non-English majors selected on a voluntary basis by the co-operating teacher. Data were collected through a survey examining students' perceptions and ideas about the relevance of textbooks to their lives. Descriptive statistics were employed during the analysis. The findings indicate that the cultural content of the mainstream English language textbooks being used in Turkey is of little relevance to the reality of Turkish learners. Turkish learners of English seem to suggest that the content incorporated in English language textbooks should correspond to their cultural reality. Based on the findings, a series of pedagogical implications for future study are provided.*

Introduction

C onscious of the need for learners of a foreign language to have access to the culture of that language, many publishers have integrated Anglo-American cultures into English language (EL) textbooks. The problem is that they have not considered the relevance of the cultural content to the local realities of particular groups of students. The fact that English is an international language spoken in many countries leads to varieties and different accents. Learners of English as a foreign language should therefore have the opportunity to acquire intercultural competence in attempting to communicate with other speakers of English who may also be coming from many different cultural backgrounds. When one starts to learn a foreign language, original linguistic and cultural information is presented to the learner. Unless relevance between one's native cognitive or cultural schema and the cultural schema of the target language is established, the learner is most likely to experience alienation and feel distant. Alptekin (1993) cited Widdowson's (1990) theoretical framework on *schematic and systemic knowledge* to make the following argument:

'A learner of English who has never resided in the target-language culture will most likely experience problems in processing English systemic data if these are presented through such unfamiliar contexts as, say, Halloween or English pubs. Even if these are explained, the learner may still fail to perceive Halloween or the pub in the same way in which they are normally evoked in the mind of the native speaker of English, as one's natural tendency is to assess a novel stimulus with respect to one's own cultural system.' (Alptekin, 1993, p. 137)

In most developing countries where English is spoken as a foreign language, teachers normally plan their lessons around imported textbooks published by renowned USA or UK publishers. Since students are the primary recipients of the linguistic and cultural content presented in these English language textbooks, it is crucial to examine students' perspectives on these textbooks. Given that textbooks play an influential role with regard to the input that the learners of the target language receive, it was decided to undertake a study in Turkey where textbooks play powerful roles in English language classrooms. Hence, this study sought to answer the following research question: Do Turkish learners of English perceive mainstream English language textbooks as culturally relevant to their lives?

This paper argues that the orientation of imposed cultural content in mainstream EL textbooks should not be merely around Anglo-American cultures. Instead, intercultural and cross-cultural awareness should be invoked through integrating information about worldwide English speaking contexts. I suggest that textbooks should reinforce international competence, understanding and awareness rather than an understanding of only certain cultures (i.e., the Anglo-American). Ultimately, it is hoped that the reader develops an understanding and sensitivity toward the relevance of content presented in EL textbooks to learners of English in the Mediterranean diaspora. It is also hoped that the study provides insights, both for teachers and publishers, about the sensitivity of material use and design, and the need for alternative designs of EL textbooks.

Literature review

English has become an international language. Speakers of English have the privilege of communicating their ideas and news to millions of other people all around the globe. This study is grounded in the literature that discusses the role and domination of English as an international language and to what extent this international status is reflected on the mainstream English language textbooks used in English language education.

English as an international language

Cross-cultural communication has grown as one of the effects of rapid globalisation. Many acknowledge that learning a foreign language is a requirement to succeed in today's world. The need to have access to information all over the world has made English an international language. Indeed, English language has become the *lingua franca* of the world. Being the default language of today's world, English is the key to stay in touch with the information age. Phillipson (1992) also adds that 'at the present time English, to a much greater extent than any other language, is the language in which the fate of most of the world's millions is decided' (p. 6). With cultural phenomena (such as broadcasts, media, cinema, music and literature) being discussed cross-culturally through English, it is hard to ignore the international dimension of English language texts.

An inevitable consequence of English being an international language is that English language texts convey culturally oriented content such as the media, the cinema, music, literature, the organisation and nature of family, home life, interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs and institutions (Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990). It is therefore an overwhelming task for any English language curriculum designer to integrate all of this content into English language education. The fact that English is spoken in a variety of ways in numerous contexts all over the world makes it even harder. The vast range of the usage of English consequently makes it difficult for both teachers and students to decide which English culture to incorporate (Prodromou, 1992) or else to integrate all the specific varieties of English (e.g., Indian English) into English Language Teaching (ELT). To cite Smith (1987): 'English already represents many cultures and it can be used by anyone as a means to express any cultural heritage and any value system' (p. 3).

Learners of English are expected to communicate with English speakers residing in countries where English is the predominant language. Textbooks, therefore, consist mostly of texts, content, and lifestyles of English speaking countries like the UK and the USA. This results in the domination of those cultures. Alptekin & Alptekin (1984) point out that the 'local culture may, regrettably, be submerged into the dominant culture of the foreign language' (p. 14). The international dimension of ELT necessitates that, in EFL contexts, ministries of education should take precautions so as not to allow the Anglo-American socio-cultural domination to take over during English language education. Otherwise, 'English language teaching would have to deal with the Anglo-Saxon oriented "traditional ethnocentric views of English language" ' (Prodromou, 1992, p. 39). On their part, Alptekin & Alptekin (1984) argue that language educators should help the learners of English develop

'an identity which is able to transcend the parochial confines of the native and target cultures by understanding and appreciating cultural diversity and pluralism thanks to the new language, while not losing sight of native norms and values in the process. In short, it is a bilingual and *intercultural* identity.' (p. 19; emphasis in original)

In a study of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in South Asia, Canagarajah (1999) reported that the students felt alienated and negative toward the English language and culture. It was found that this was due to the implicit Western bias of the materials and the instructor, further reinforced by the fact that the cultural content was never explicitly discussed. Consequently, students felt anxious about and disconnected from the target language and culture. Because of these circumstances, the students indicated that they favoured the more traditional approach of memorising the grammar and vocabulary, presumably because it was a process that allowed them to keep a certain distance from the target language and culture. The second language students' fear of being *absorbed* by the culture of the language they are studying is repeatedly identified as a problem by researchers in the USA and in other countries.

Cultural context of textbooks

Textbooks are usually the primary sources of providing linguistic and cultural input especially for the learners of English as a foreign language. No longer thought to be value-neutral, textbooks and other materials used in language learning generally present a certain way of looking at the world, i.e., through the cultural lens of the authors. According to Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet (1992), many textbooks were written from a mono-cultural perspective prior to the 1940s.

There are two other factors to be considered while analyzing the integration of cultural content into mainstream English language textbooks. On the one hand some textbooks are structural and cover grammatical and lexical usage of the language without incorporating situational, topical subject matter; on the other, others focus more on situational contexts, which reinforce socio-cultural subject matter. Since EFL teachers tend to follow situational or functional textbooks, the textbooks may play various roles, including being the 'teacher,' a cultural resource, and the authority in the language class.

Richards (1993) claims that less experienced teachers and some teachers whose native language is not English may understandably personalise textbooks in this way and fail to look at them critically. A textbook often carries the *imprimatur* of important publishers or ministries of education. In addition, when school administrators, or the ministry itself, select textbooks on behalf of all the teachers within their purview, they greatly lend them an aura of 'authority' with

regard to both instructional and cultural standards. As a result, even experienced teachers can become over-dependent on textbooks (Shannon, 1987; Richards, 1993). But when a textbook provides everything that the teacher needs for instruction, it becomes a 'de-skiller' in that the teacher may not use a more creative, interpretative, or critical approach toward the materials being used (Hinkel, 1999).

The textbook can also function as the ideology of the English language class, in the sense that it reflects a world view or cultural system, a social construction that may be imposed on teachers and students and that indirectly creates their view of culture (Hinkel, 1999). De Castell, Luke & Luke (1989) claim that English textbooks can serve as a form of cultural politics by including or excluding aspects of social, economic, political or cultural realities. Textbooks may become cultural icons or symbols, a representation of the cultural reality. But what these symbols represent varies from culture to culture. Especially in the case of ELT, the standard cultural symbol is usually representative of the Anglo-American world, particularly the UK and the USA. In such case, the commercial textbooks marketed in the Third World or developing countries lack focus on local students' needs, and most importantly, they lack the local cultural content. However, since English language textbooks are seen as the heart of many ELT programmes, their relevance to students' reality or cultural background is equally important.

English language textbooks based on English speaking cultures

There is a large number of EFL textbooks that focus on target cultures. Some of them deserve Brumfit's (1980) description of 'masses of rubbish that [are] skilfully marketed' (p. 30). The design and content of such textbooks are obviously influenced by commercial values. However, there are now changes in this respect. Current sales techniques compel textbook publishers to include environmental and social issues. Thus, not only do recent EFL textbooks include materials designed to promote awareness of race, gender and environmental issues, but these points are also often highlighted in the publishers' promotional materials. Effective examples of this contemporary approach to integrating social and cultural content in elementary level English language textbooks are the two volumes that constitute Walker's (1994) *Success-Communicating in English*, which is set in the USA but marketed worldwide. The multicultural nature of the American society is portrayed by including members of minority groups, shown positively in responsible positions or professional roles. From a realistic social perspective, issues concerning health, crime, the environment and the role of women are raised by providing information in simple graphic formats. In an explicit move to counter stereotypes, some texts feature husbands as responsible

for childcare and housework, while their wives are the breadwinners. A unit in Volume 2, under the heading 'What Are You Concerned About?', gives details of contemporary social, moral, and economic issues, such as, child abuse. The text communicates aspects of such problems, but does not provide solutions. Students are asked to share their own opinions and concerns.

A second example of a more realistic textbook is Hennig's (1991) *English G, Band A6, 10th Class*. This book is aimed at advanced level German EFL students. Its English speaking culture focus is the USA. Among the various themes mentioned in the book, one finds 'Blacks in America'. This theme is set within a detailed historical framework, covering the days of slavery up to the more recent elections of black men and women to the USA Senate and state governorships. Students are invited to analyse alternative interpretations of the progress made by black Americans by examining data comparing black and white income groups and percentages of college graduates. Further alternative perspectives are offered in the interviews with black families of differing social backgrounds when these collective interviews are matched with actual demographics. On the whole, these texts offer complex, in-depth versions of the target culture.

It is easy to assume that textbooks should reflect a target culture. However, Prodromou's (1992) survey of Greek students reveals that some students have mixed views about the cultural focus of their English lessons. When a sample of 300 students were asked what language teaching should be about, 60% wanted to focus on British culture and 26% on American culture. When they were asked what they thought the content or subject matter of their English language classes should be, 36% said it should be about the culture of other countries and 27% said it should be about Greek culture. Since there is no available study that discusses the preferences of Turkish learners of English concerning the cultural content of English language textbooks, this study attempts to investigate the textbooks' perceived cultural relevance to Turkish students.

Textbooks aimed at international cultures

The rationale for international target cultures is that speakers who do not speak English as a first language frequently use it in international situations. One example of such a situation would be German teachers teaching English in Japan to Japanese factory technicians who need English to speak to American and German engineers. None of these groups has English as a first language.

A pre-intermediate EFL textbook that aims at international target cultures is Priesack & Tomscha's (1993) *One World, Secondary English*. This textbook is accompanied by cassettes drawing attention not only to a range of native speaker

accents, but also to some accents of non-native speakers from around the world. Volume 3 of *One World, Secondary English* has units focusing on British history, Australian geography, Spanish tourism, the Chinese New Year, a Canadian story, Greek mythology, and other topics. Potter's (1990) *Panorama*, which is an elementary to intermediate series, offers another approach toward integrating intercultural content. The theme of an American family living in Rio de Janeiro, which allows some focus on Brazilian culture compared with American culture, is spread across three volumes. A second theme of visits focuses on Istanbul, Marrakech, Seoul and Buenos Aires, and also compares Bangkok and Tokyo. Elsewhere, themes such as job applications in Milan and attending an international conference in Nairobi offer international contexts where English is portrayed as the *lingua franca*.

While such textbooks offer interesting cultural mirrors, the learning of culture and the development of intercultural skills depend largely on how the textbooks are used in the classroom, that is, on the quality of interaction between students, texts and teachers. Therefore, one should bear in mind that encouraging cultural awareness and integrating the international cultures in ELT classes are crucial components to achieving intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence

In view of being the *lingua franca* or international language, English language teaching becomes tricky as its culture inevitably carries the cultures of the world. The literature suggests that intercultural competence and awareness should be fostered in English language education so that learners are exposed to the pluralistic ways in which English is communicated.

Meyer (1991) defines intercultural competence in relation to a broader foreign speaker competence and recognises this ability if one behaves in a flexible way while communicating to individuals representing other foreign cultures. Intercultural competence then implies adequacy and flexibility that allow the person to be aware of the cultural differences between his or her native culture and the foreign culture. In addition, 'Intercultural competence includes the capacity of establishing one's self identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation, and of helping other people to stabilise their self-identity' (Turkan & Celik, 2007, p. 23).

In intercultural foreign language education, the learner assumes the role of a 'comparative ethnographer' while learning a particular foreign language (Buttjes & Byram, 1991, p. 19). Kramsch (1993) introduces the concept of cognitive modification, which suggests that materials should not only consider the cultural, social background of the learner, but should also help to develop the skill to

operate in the cultural contexts of the 'other'. Moreover, in order to develop cultural and language awareness, materials need to secure more thorough integration of cultural adjustment that one inevitably goes through while learning a foreign language.

The shift toward a functional approach to EFL teaching, driven by needs analysis and predictable performance objectives, has coincided with a developing awareness of the growing role of English as an international language rather than a cultural specificity. Cunningsworth's (1984) *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Materials* makes the case against culture-specific course books that clearly continue to echo well with major ELT publishers. Cunningsworth (1995) argues that culture-specific course books will be limited unless students can relate to the cultural background that the textbooks are based on. According to him, a strong depiction of British life might block learning rather than help the learner. That is, it could be worth learning the structures of the language rather than trying to put the learners into a social world that is foreign to them. The literature, in fact, frequently refers to establishing a sense of relevance to learners' reality as being critical (see Alptekin, 1993). Alptekin (1993) alludes this sense of relevance to cultural schemas and emphasises that foreign language learners need to relate to the cultural content given in texts, because 'When the relevant cultural background assumptions and constructs are missing … reading tends to turn into a time consuming, laborious, and frustrating experience' (p. 137). But, as critics have pointed out, textbooks still run 'the risks of imposing a one-size-fits-all solution … on problems that are by nature very local and very complex' (Ranalli, 2003, p. 4).

Phillipson (1992), Holliday (1994), Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999) have criticised the marketing imperatives of a publishing industry that attempts to increasingly satisfy the perceived needs of a global clientele. These scholars, following their critical scrutiny of EFL teaching practices, adopted the notion of imperialism, which basically refers to the dominance of one society or community over another. The types of imperialism – such as economic, political, military, communicative, cultural and social – were extended to include linguistic imperialism in the ELT field as well (Galtung, 1980). According to Phillipson (1992), 'the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages' (p. 45).

The lenses provided by *intercultural competence and awareness* literature thus seem to argue that recently published mainstream English language textbooks should have cultural relativism and more pluralistic representations of English speaking cultures rather than the specific culture of an English speaking country.

The present study

The literature review has served as a base for understanding the integration of cultural content in ELT textbooks, cultural domination in ELT textbooks and adverse effects of irrelevant ELT textbooks on students. Based on this understanding, this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature about the relevance of English language textbooks to learners of English in Turkish educational settings. Based on the data gathered, the next sections discuss the issue of textbooks providing relevant content for the students to cultivate intercultural competence and awareness. It is also argued that students should be able to raise their consciousness about cultures other than the frequent emphasis on Anglo-American cultures. In other words, students should be aware that there are other learners of English, just like them, all over the world and that there are different ways of doing things, not just Anglo-American cultural approaches.

Adopting this theoretical perspective, the present study aimed to reveal whether Turkish learners of English actually find their textbooks culturally relevant or not. More precisely, the study explored the following research question: Do Turkish learners of English perceive mainstream ELT textbooks as culturally relevant to their lives? To answer this question, a survey yielding both qualitative and quantitative data was administered.

The participants

The participants of this study consisted of 45 students attending the 10th and 11th grade at a prominent Anatolian Teacher Training High School in Antalya, Turkey. Twenty-seven of them were English majors focusing on learning English, while the remaining 18 were non-English majors studying applied sciences, social sciences, Turkish and mathematics. These grade levels were chosen because the students, by this point in their studies, would have been exposed to many years of English language education. On the other hand, the school was selected because the researcher knew it well by virtue of being one of its former students. The co-operating teacher selected the participants on a voluntary basis. Although the participants' general demographic information was collected as part of the questionnaire, their age, gender, socio-economic level, family background, years of English language education, and living environment are not included in the present analysis.

All the students were native Turkish speakers. Their ages ranged between 16 and 19. The majority, 57.8%, were 16 year-olds. The females accounted for 51.1%, while the males for 48.9%. With regard to their family's socio-economic background, 40% came from a low socio-economic background, 31.1% were

middle class, and the rest came from high class families. While the vast majority lived in the city of Antalya, 13.3% lived in other towns, and one participant lived in a village.

The majority, 82.2%, had 8 years of exposure to English language education. These participants were considered to be a reliable source of information about attitudes toward English. Of the other participants, 11.1% had 7 years of experience, and the remaining three had 5, 9 and 10 years respectively. The English majors had 14 hours of English per week, while the non-English majors had 4 or 5 hours. Only three of the students had been abroad for a period ranging between ten days and one month. The rest of them had always lived in Turkey. The vast majority of the participants, 95.6%, thought they were studying British English. Only 2.2% thought that the variety they were studying was American English. The remaining few students chose not to respond. With regard to language variety preference, 37.7% preferred American English to British English and 60.1% preferred British English to American English. The rest chose not to respond.

Data collection and analysis

In order to investigate what the participants aimed to achieve from learning English and what the textbooks actually had to offer to them, they were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire, which consisted of three parts, had been previously piloted with 6 students in the United States (3 from Turkey and 3 from the USA). The first part (Questions 1-36) focused on the students' purposes for learning English and their attitudes toward English. The second part (Questions 37-40) was administered two days after the first part. Its main aim was to determine the correlation between the communicative acts presented in the textbooks and students' purposes for learning English. The third part, which was administered on the same day of the second part, centred on students' perceptions and ideas about the cultural relevance of their textbooks to their own reality. During administration, the coordinating teacher gave special attention to handing the second and third parts only to those who had completed the first part. The third part consisted of five sub-sections. These referred to: (i) the usefulness of the textbooks; (ii) how appealing the textbooks are to the students; (iii) the perceived roles of the textbooks; (iv) in whose economic and cultural interests the textbooks are produced; and (v) which parts of the textbooks relate to students' learning purposes. There were three types of questions: multiple choice questions, open ended questions and some using a 4-point Likert scale. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the responses to multiple choice questions and the Likert-type questions.

The qualitative data (i.e., the students' responses to the open ended questions) were translated from Turkish to English by the researcher. Due to space limitations, this paper focuses only on some of the results from the third part of the questionnaire.

Results

Learning language through a textbook

Thirty percent of English majors indicated that they like learning English through textbooks. However, 48% of them did not find the textbooks appealing. In their view, the textbooks are boring, grammar-oriented and offer an unappealing choice of topics and content. Some of their statements were:

> 'They are so boring. The only benefit is that we can learn about other cultures, but we could learn that from other sources anyway.'

> 'I don't hate them, but they were obviously not written with an attractive updated style suitable for today's topics.'

> 'The textbook is very boring and has formal language. Sometimes the topics are just useless.'

> 'The topics and cultural content of the textbook are very distant to me and irrelevant.'

On the other hand, 55% of non-English majors indicated that they do not like learning English through textbooks. Some of their comments were:

> 'I like them because they are colourful and fun. However, sometimes they are like the newspapers; very boring.'

> 'I cannot say I hate them, but I don't like them either. However, they are good for teaching us English.'

Although the non-English majors generally tended to dislike using the textbooks, some of the students found the textbooks 'interesting', 'products of another culture', 'informative about every topic' and 'appealing'.

As far as the textbooks' choice of topics is concerned, 11% on non-English majors indicated that textbooks help them to learn English idioms, pronunciation and useful expressions.

With regard to the role of textbooks in the classroom, 33% of the English majors affirmed that textbooks are the ultimate authority in the language class.

While 30% indicated that their textbooks are not designed effectively enough to teach about the English speaking cultures, 26% reported exactly the opposite. Fifteen percent were of the opinion that the textbook played the role of a teacher, effectively replacing the teacher when he or she is inefficient. When it comes to the non-English majors, 28% expressed the view that the textbook is the authority in class. A higher percentage of non-English majors (i.e., 28% in comparison to the 15% of English majors) consider the textbook as a teacher. These students see the textbooks as the ultimate authority in the language class. They also think that textbooks have as much power as the teacher in teaching about English speaking cultures. Both English majors and non-English majors report that textbooks govern most of the instructional activities in the classroom.

The questionnaire also queried the participants if they could learn English without the use of textbooks and to what extent they saw the textbooks as being influential in their English classes. While 22% of the English majors agreed that textbooks are necessary resources from which they learn about English speaking cultures and English language, 11% disagreed. With the non-English majors, while 22% claimed that it was necessary to use textbooks, 56% pointed out that they could do without them. One of the students, however, put forward a much more balanced view that effectively put the learning needs of the students firmly at the centre of the discussion:

> 'Just like we need the teachers for effective instruction, we also need effective tools such as the textbooks. So textbooks should exist, but their selection should be done according to what the students need to learn and what they are interested in.'

The participants also expressed their views about the efficiency with which their textbooks give information about English speaking cultures. Only 9% of them were of the opinion that textbooks are not an efficient means by which students learn about the English speaking cultures. It could therefore be inferred from this study that the majority of Turkish students think that they could learn about English speaking cultures from textbooks.

Cultural orientation of textbooks

The English language textbooks used by the participants had an Anglo-American orientation. Seven percent of the students expressed concern about this ethnocentric nature of their textbooks. One participant suggested that students, instead of simply focusing on British and American cultures, should be allowed to use resources other than the textbook so that they could learn about other cultures.

The English majors and the non-English majors deemed to differ about how far it is possible to learn English speaking cultures through the textbooks. While 30% of the majors said that they do not learn English speaking cultures through textbooks, only 17% of the non-majors were of the same opinion. A possible explanation could be that since English majors take more English classes than non-majors, they are more exposed to the 'limitations' of textbooks. Most of the participants believed that the publishers, specifically the British and American, are the ones who benefit financially (71.1% supported this view) and culturally (75.5% supported this view) from textbooks, and that they are therefore the ones whose interests are taken into account when producing textbooks. They also believed that the textbooks are of no benefit to Turkish culture. Textbooks emerged as distant productions made to benefit mostly those who produce them. Apart from the obvious financial gains made by the foreign publishers, the participants appeared also concerned that the countries of these publishers were benefiting by freely exporting their culture under the guise of educational textbooks. The statements reproduced below are typical of the arguments made by the participants:

'The British benefit from textbooks, both by selling their educational products and by introducing and spreading their culture.'

'It's the Americans who benefit!! It's always them! I'm not benefiting from them. I don't think the others do either. The textbooks are very dumb.'

'Since the textbooks come from abroad, it is the importing agencies or institutions that earn a lot.'

'Our textbooks serve the imperialist purposes of imperialist and colonist countries.'

On the other hand, the statement 'Those who do not know about those cultures benefit from textbooks', written by one of the students, gives voice to the minority of participants who appeared less or not concerned about the financial and cultural 'difficulties' attached to the imported textbooks they used in class. With regard to the benefits of using the English language textbooks on Turkish culture, 20% of the students indicated that the textbooks enable them to compare their culture with the British culture, and in the process gain insights into both. One student did however raise an interesting point concerning the importance of preserving one's culture:

'The only benefit for our culture is that we get to look at issues from a wider perspective as long as we preserve our own culture.'

Fifty-three percent of the students were of the opinion that English language textbooks disadvantage rather than benefit Turkish culture. The reasons they put forward were mostly linked to exposing the inadequacies of Turkish culture, the destruction of Turkish culture and loss of own identity:

> 'I think textbooks show what kind of inadequacies or underdevelopment our Turkish culture has.'

> 'There are no benefits at all. On the contrary, they spoil our culture.'

> 'No benefit at all, because they never publish any textbook related to our culture.'

> 'None at all. Actually, it damages our culture. The young are losing their identity!!!'

> 'Textbooks do not benefit our culture. Instead they damage and disadvantage our culture because our culture is being assimilated.'

The students were also asked to comment about the relevance of the textbooks to their purposes for learning English and about the cultural relevance of the English language textbooks to their lives. Forty-two percent of the students stated that doing grammar exercises and listening to dialogues that focus on the British and American cultures do not correspond to their purpose for learning about different cultures. Moreover, 20% of them said that none of the parts of the English language textbooks appeal to them as far as learning about different cultures goes, because, as one student put it, 'the target culture is not even incorporated'.

The participants were further asked to visualise themselves teaching Turkish culture abroad using textbooks. From the English majors, most of whom were going to become English language teachers, 19% indicated that they would never use textbooks to teach Turkish culture. One of them even expressed the view that 'Culture cannot be taught through textbooks'. Having said that, 56% of the students did come up with alternative ways of teaching Turkish culture without depending completely on textbooks. These participants, who saw no need for adhering strictly to any particular textbook, seemed mostly concerned about familiarising their prospective students with the customs, traditions and way of life of the Turkish people. Here are some of their suggestions:

> 'I would teach the traditions and conventions of the Turks.'

> 'I would talk about the prominent people in our history. I would talk about our customs and traditions. I would tell how to behave appropriately and where.'

'I would use the textbook, but mostly I would relate my own observations.'

'Before using the textbooks, I would try to talk about Turkey by showing photographs and videos about Turkey. After that, I would make use of the textbooks.'

'I would not be putting a special effort into spreading the Turkish culture. I would just inform my students about things that they would need to know if they came to Turkey.'

'I would focus on the parts related to the Turkish culture and try my best to convey the culture by teaching Turkish songs.'

'I would bring in videos about Turkey. I would briefly talk about the culture without boring the students. I would talk about topics that interest my students in addition to the topics in the textbooks.'

Sixteen percent of the students, writing statements such as 'I wouldn't use the textbooks, but rather newspapers and magazines' claimed that they would never use textbooks. The overall picture was therefore one in which students considered their Anglo-American culturally oriented textbooks to be irrelevant to their reality. In general, the students also expressed the opinion that textbooks should not be the mere authority in class.

Relation of textbooks to own culture

Within this theme, although the English majors and the non-English majors responded similarly to some of the questions, there were also differences to warrant presenting the responses of the two groups separately. Among the majors, 15% claimed explicitly that the culture in the English language textbooks does not relate to Turkish culture. With the non-majors, the corresponding figure increased to 28%. While just 7% of the majors did not consider the textbooks as useful, this figure rose to 39% with the non-majors. An aversion to learning English through textbooks was evident in 48% of the majors and 56% of the non-majors. Most of the students reported being bored with textbooks because these did not attract their interests or meet their needs. Here are some of their written comments:

'The topics and cultural content of the textbook are very distant to me and irrelevant.'

'The textbooks are obviously designed on behalf of the British culture.'

> 'I don't hate them, but since they don't relate to the Turkish culture, I am not very interested.'

With regard to the cultural relevance of the textbooks to the Turkish culture, 41% of the students indicated that they are not relevant. This view was expressed in statements such as:

> 'The topics are not too bad. The level is appropriate, but they are not relevant to the Turkish culture.'

> 'Our textbook does not have anything to do with the Turkish culture except for some proper Turkish individual names at the end of the textbook.'

But not all the students complained about the textbooks' obvious lack of relevance to the Turkish culture. In fact, while some students praised their relevance to the British culture, others suggested that their textbooks would have been even better had they also been similarly relevant to other English speaking cultures, not just the British or American. The following statements represented these points of view:

> 'The cultural relevance is good because I believe it should not talk about the Turkish culture, but the English culture.'

> 'The textbooks are useful. However, if it could give information about other cultures, it would be great.'

Intercultural understanding

Slightly more than half the students (i.e., 56%) found the topics in the textbooks appropriate for their interests in learning about various cultures. The fact that 43.8% of the students disagreed suggests that this issue almost divided the participants into two equal parts, with those agreeing slightly tipping the scales. With regard to whether textbooks helped them to develop an awareness of intercultural norms, 62.5% of the students responded in the affirmative, while 25% disagreed. This suggests that the students are generally interested in developing intercultural norms and understandings, and that this interest appears to be largely accommodated by their textbooks. As far as the accuracy of the cultural pictures presented is concerned, 43.8% of the students reported that their textbooks provide inaccurate or sanitised views of the USA or the UK. In fact, 56.3% of the participants strongly agreed that social realities, such as unemployment, poverty, family breakdowns and racism are not included in the textbooks. This implies that

only ethnocentric images from the US or the UK are represented – a reality that does not meet the needs and interests of the students who want to have an awareness of intercultural norms. In addition, 62.5% of the students indicated that their textbooks are either too British or too American, and that therefore these do not relate to their interests and cultural background. Having said that, 50% of the participants do not find the relationships, behaviours and intentions of the characters portrayed in the textbooks foreign to them. In view of this, they did not find it hard to interpret those portrayals. At the same time, 31.3% of the students reported that they find it hard to interpret the relationships, behaviours and intentions of the characters portrayed in the textbooks.

Taken globally, the majority of the students indicated that they find the English language textbooks useful. But, in reality, there was a significant difference between the English majors and the non-English majors. While 93% of the majors considered the textbook to be of considerable value to them, only 44% of the non-majors were of that opinion. Statements such as 'The textbooks are very useful because we can learn about their culture, but nothing else', suggest an awareness among the students that while they need to practise English more, their textbooks do not serve this purpose.

Discussion

There were three main themes that emerged from the data. The first theme explored for whose cultural and financial interests the textbooks are written. The second theme was related to students' perceptions of the benefits derived from using textbooks. The third and last theme concerned students' opinions regarding the cultural content they would like to be exposed to in the EL textbooks.

Regarding the first theme, which dealt with for whose cultural and financial interests the textbooks are written, most of the English majors and even the non-English majors demonstrated a considerable level of critical consciousness. Although their answers varied along a continuum, the most commonly expressed opinion was that textbooks are either written for the benefit of the American and British cultures (which the literature review presents as the two main English speaking cultures), or else written for the benefit of publishers who make a living out of publishing the English language textbooks. With regard to cultural benefits, the participants were more inclined to mention the British rather than the Americans, because they believed it is the British who normally produce textbooks. Although in most cases the students mentioned either the cultural or the financial interests, 8 mentioned both. Interestingly enough, one student made the point that textbooks are not published in the interests of students and their

teachers. Instead, in line with the claims made by Phillipson (1992), Holliday (1994), Pennycook (1994) and Canagarajah (1999), some of the majors and a number of non-majors made a direct link between the publication of textbooks and the imperialist interests of colonist countries. Imperialism, as now understood in the field of Applied Linguistics, basically refers to the policy of reassuring the dominance of one culture over another (see Phillipson, 1992; Holliday, 1994; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999).

The second theme centred on who or what benefits from the use of the students' English language textbooks. This theme brought up a net division between the English majors and the rest of the students. For while 25 out of the 27 English majors responded that it is the students and the readers of the English language textbooks that benefit mostly from using textbooks, most of the non-majors, in line with the literature, responded that it is the foreign countries (most notably the USA, the UK and the EU) that benefit mostly in the process. The students were, however, more of one mind when asked about the benefits that the textbooks have for their own culture (i.e., the Turkish culture). Most of them responded in fact that they could see no benefit for Turkish culture. On this particular aspect, the students' ideas seem to be consistent with Alptekin & Alptekin's (1984) position that the culture of EFL students (i.e., the Turkish culture in present study) subordinates itself to the dominant culture (i.e., the Anglo-American cultures in present study).

The third theme explored the cultural content that the participants would have welcomed in their EL textbooks. Apart from putting forward some suggestions regarding how to incorporate cultural content in EL classes, the students seemed to generally agree that a textbook should also serve to broaden students' knowledge of the different cultures of the world. Believing this, they made the point that the textbook, instead of concentrating simply on British and American cultures, should also cover aspects from other cultures. The textbooks they were using at the time of the study were criticised in fact for not having this wider perspective. This is how one student put it:

> 'The textbooks I have looked into focus on the British and American cultures. However, the textbooks I had previously used to cover the cultural content of other cultures.'

The Turkish students' general wish to have a wider and more balanced cultural focus in their textbooks suggests that they are different from the Greek students mentioned in Prodromou's (1992, pp. 39-49) study. For while some of his Greek students had mixed views on the cultural focus of their English lessons, the Turkish students in the present study indicated that the cultural content in EL textbooks should not focus merely on British and American cultures.

Implications and conclusion

Since it is the students who are mostly immersed in the cultural and structural content of the English language textbooks, importance should always be given to their purposes, interests and needs. Parallel to this view, this study indicates that textbooks should include culturally relevant input so that students can be successfully involved in the communicative situations that are likely to occur in their real lives. Special consideration should therefore be given to the cultural content of the textbooks in order to make it relevant to the realities of the students involved.

The cultural content of textbooks is considered to be important in view of the fact that most students consider textbooks as the ultimate authority inside English language classrooms. This renders students reliant on the socio-cultural input that the English language textbooks provide with regard to acquiring an understanding of the English speaking cultures. A pedagogical implication would therefore be that teachers should try to link the cultural relevance of the topics presented to the students' own backgrounds. Moreover, it is advisable that English language textbooks should not revolve merely around British or American cultural content.

Given the international status of English, teachers should help students develop intercultural competence 'by equipping them with linguistic and cultural behavior which will enable them to communicate effectively with others and also by equipping them with an awareness of difference, and with strategies for coping with such difference' (Hyde, 1998; cited in Alptekin, 2002, p. 63). In other words, students should be cognitively ready to encounter English speakers from India, Poland and so on. Students should also realise that Anglo-American English is not the only norm or variety. Intercultural awareness and competence would make it possible for students to openly and effectively communicate the differences with these 'other' speakers of English.

For students to decipher whether or not intercultural awareness is being invoked as opposed to simply presenting a mono-cultural context (most likely the British one), the notion of 'critical language awareness' should be introduced to both teachers and students. As a result, the teachers would be able to develop a critical attitude in students regarding the cultural orientation of the English language textbooks. This course of action would also make it possible for teachers not to submit themselves to the de-skilling effect of the authoritative decisions being made by publishers or ministries of education. Teachers should demand their right to choose the textbooks in agreement with their students. The control and authority of the teacher over the textbooks was highlighted in one of the statements made by an English major student:

> 'The teacher should not be dependent on the textbooks. It is the textbooks
> that should be dependent on the teacher.'

Future studies in this area might consider a number of different directions. For instance, the findings of the present study may be explored further by using qualitative methods, such as classroom observations and individual interviews with the students. In addition, it is felt that the domination of Anglo-American cultures needs to be objectively scaled by students. This can be achieved by having students   categorise the cultural content in ELT textbooks according to which culture (the target language culture(s) or source culture or international cultures) they think is being emphasised. Another direction could be to explore alternative representations of target language culture(s) by designing and discussing sample plans of textbook chapters.

To conclude, it appears that the cultural content of the mainstream English language textbooks being used in Turkey is of little relevance to the realities of Turkish learners of English. This study consequently established that the content incorporated in English language textbooks should correspond to the cultural realities of the students using them. This study has also highlighted the need for textbook materials that foster intercultural and cross-cultural awareness. It might also be a good idea to introduce such notions to the EL curriculum designers. This might help to foster an appreciation of and encourage intercultural competence in learners of English language, which would be a welcome development to the current practice of almost encouraging such learners to idealise the monolithic Anglo-American cultures presented in textbooks.

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