

Journal of English language Teaching and Learning  
University of Tabriz  
Volume 12, Issue 26, (Fall & Winter 2020)  
Pages 145-173

## **Evaluation of Culture Representation in Vision English Textbook Series for Iranian Secondary Public Education\***

**Mojtaba Gheitasi\*\***

Ph.D. candidate of TEFL, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran.

**Mohammad Aliakbari (Corresponding author)\*\*\***

Professor of TEFL, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran.

**Nouroddin Yousofi\*\*\*\***

Assistant professor of TEFL, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran.

### **Abstract**

This study evaluated the cultural content of Vision textbook series that are currently in use in Iranian public secondary school system. The aim was to find the most frequent cultural references as well as the most-frequently-represented cultural senses. For this purpose, frequency counts were used to collect the data and the culture categorization framework (Adaskou et. al., 1990) and cultural reference framework (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999), modified by Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014), were used to analyze the data. Results of the frequency counts indicated that the Vision ELT textbooks contained the most cultural content associated with Persian as the source culture. Similarly, the focus was primarily on the esthetic sense of culture, followed respectively by semantic, sociological and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) senses. The study ends up with implications for EFL stake-holders in Iranian context as well as the ELT enterprise in general.

**Key words:** ELT, local Textbooks, Cultural content, Iranian context, Vision textbook series.

\*Received: 2020/01/30

Accepted: 2020/06/27

\*\*E-mail: mgbietasi@gmail.com

\*\*\*E-mail: maliakbari@hotmail.com

\*\*\*\*E-mail: nyousofi@yahoo.com

## 1. Introduction

There has been much disagreement in representation of culture in English language teaching (ELT) textbooks in the last five decades. Learning a language is believed to involve, in addition to its syntax and grammar, learning certain sociolinguistic, cultural and ideological dimensions (Wang, 2016). Hence, the inclusion or exclusion of culture, has always been a topic of much dispute in language education. The importance of culture is, undoubtedly, due to the role it plays in communication between people, since successful communication across languages demands appreciation of different cultural norms of communication, and recognition of people's thought and values (Saville-Troike, 2003). Textbooks, as carriers of culture, can serve a central role in the ELT industry. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) asserted that the textbook "can be a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, and an ideology" (in Aliakbari, 2004, p. 3). A review of textbook analysis literature in ELT showed that textbooks are "sociocultural materials, institutionally sanctioned and ideologically embedded, presenting texts as closely related to the politics of identity" (Curd-Christian & Weninger, 2015, p. 1). Designing textbooks is, therefore, a controversial topic. It is informed by a wide range of commercial, ideological, and pedagogical requirements and interests. Most of this controversy concerns the inclusion of the cultural content; i.e. whether the source, target, or international culture should be incorporated in the textbooks, and also which aspects of culture should (or should not) be included (Aliakbari, 2004).

Much concern arises from the global ELT textbooks which are designed in English-speaking countries to be used worldwide. The problem with most of these textbooks, on the views of the scholars in non-English-speaking countries, is that they adopt a one-size-fits-all approach which rather ignores the differences in culture and values (Tajeddin & Bahrebar, 2017). In order to overcome such a flaw, locally-published textbooks are produced in non-English-speaking countries to fulfil the local needs. These local books, on the other hand, are presumed to take into account the cultural and pedagogical needs,

desires, and aims of learners in a given English language learning context (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Evaluation of the local ELT textbooks is, thus, due to the prominent roles they play in language education and intercultural communication, a necessary and required undertaking. Owing to the importance of English textbooks in ELT and presence of much controversy in this regard, this study aimed to evaluate the cultural content of the locally-prepared Vision English textbook series (Vision 1, Vision 2 and Vision 3) that are in use in Iranian public secondary school system.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

A mounting body of research has been carried out on the extent to which cultural content has been included in ELT textbooks. Overall, there are two contrasting views concerning the relationship between culture and EFL. First, Culture and language are indivisible; consequently, English cannot be taught independent from its cultural context. Second, culture and language are separable; thus, English should be taught independently of its culture. Instead, contexts familiar to the students should be used (Sardi, 2002; in Ashraf, Motallebzadeh & Kafi, 2013). The question, then, is not whether to include cultural elements in the teaching of English or not, but which culture or cultures should receive focus and how this should be carried out (McDonough, 2002).

Textbooks around the world are of different cultural orientations; i.e. they are based on source cultures, target culture or international target cultures. Source cultures refer to learners' own culture (L1 culture), target culture is the culture in which the target language is used as a first language (L2 culture); while international target cultures refer to various cultures in English, or non-English-speaking countries which use English as an international language (Aliakbari, 2004).

Since textbooks have a central role in the integration of language and culture, numerous studies have investigated the cultural content of ELT textbooks used around the world (e.g. Abdullah & Kumari, 2009; Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990; Aliakbari, 2004; Asgari, 2011; Baleghizadeh & Jamali Motahed, 2010; García, 2005; Hamiloğlu & Mendi, 2010; Kiss & Weninger, 2013; Lee, 2009; Ndura, 2004;

McKay, 2003b; Rashidi & Meihami, 2016; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014; Tajeddin & bahrebar, 2017; Weninger & Kiss, 2013).

Hamiloğlu and Mendi (2010) analyzed intercultural content of five ELT course books in Turkey with the aim of identifying cross-cultural elements presented and the frequency of their appearance in the textbooks. They found that cultural topics related to the US and England as the main target cultures of English were excluded. Abdullah and Kumari (2009) studied textbooks used in Malaysia. They revealed that sociological traits were the main theme presented in the textbooks and that mostly local characters from different ethnic groups were represented in the evaluated textbooks. McKay (2003b) found that most textbooks used in Chile focus on the local culture as well and argued that English is nowadays used internationally, so it cannot be associated with a single native culture, and so non-English-speaking countries have to focus more on local teaching content and adopt methods that best suit their own context. Likewise, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) emphasize the significance of L1 cultural information, arguing that knowing local culture will help learners to further appreciate their own cultural identity.

Adaskou et al. (1990) studied teaching materials in Moroccan secondary school system. They found that the inclusion of a cultural component in language teaching can improve international understanding, enhance appreciation of one's own culture, facilitate learners' visits to foreign countries and contact with their people, and motivate learners. They also concluded that exposing students to western culture is not helpful or encouraging. To them, exposing students to Western culture brings about cultural comparison which consequently produce dissatisfaction with learners' own culture. In addition, some models of behavior in English-speaking culture are detrimental, since they contradict local values. Further, they found that students might be "more motivated to learn English when it is presented in contexts that relate its use realistically to their lives as young adults in Morocco" (p. 7). Adaskou et al. (1990) also proposed a framework

that includes four dimensions or senses for culture; namely aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic senses.

Various studies have specifically explored the cultural dimensions of global or localized ELT textbooks drawing on the framework proposed by Adaskou et al. (1990) in the context of Iran.

Zarei and Khalessi (2011) investigated the cultural load in Interchange English language textbooks series. To this end, a careful analysis of the content of the English books was carried out based on a model of cultural patterns. The categories mainly included: values, norms, institutions, and artifacts. Each of these four categories contained some sub-components. The results exhibited that textbooks are artifacts which are strongly grounded in cultural assumptions and biases.

Rajabi and Ketabi (2012) examined the cultural elements in four English language textbooks that were popular in the private language schools in Iran, namely Interchange, Headway, Top Notch, and On Your Mark, in order to mark the most recurrent cultural dimension. They found that the pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense of culture were the most predominant all over the textbook followed by the sociological sense, the aesthetic sense and finally the semantic sense.

Rashidi and Meihami (2016) carried out a study aimed to investigate the cultural reference in ELT textbooks of the inner, outer, and expanding circle countries and also to examine the cultural elements represented in these ELT textbooks. To that end, three ELT textbook series from inner (the U. S., The U. K.), outer (India), and expanding circle (Iran) countries were selected and analyzed. The results showed that there were differences among the ELT textbooks of different circles. The ELT textbooks of the inner circle contained more L1 and L2 cultural content, the ELT textbooks of the expanding circle, however, contained more L1 and international cultural content; and the ELT textbooks of the outer circle tended to contain L1, L2, and international cultural content. With respect to the cultural elements, the inner and outer circle textbooks contained more L2 esthetic cultural

elements, whereas in the expanding circle ELT textbooks L1 esthetic and sociolinguistic cultural senses tended to appear more frequently.

Tajeddin & Teimournezhad (2014) investigated the representation of culture in international (Top Notch book series, Saslow & Ascher, 2006) and locally-published textbooks (the Iran language Institute (ILI) English book series, intermediate level, 2004) used in Iran. The content analysis showed that most of the cultural elements represented in the local textbooks were culturally neutral. Additionally, in the local textbook sociological values were stressed more than the aesthetic sense of culture. However, the main focus in the international textbooks was on intercultural elements, mostly on aesthetic dimension. Target language cultural elements were relatively more apparent in the international textbooks while very few culturally neutral representations were observed.

Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017) carried out a study aimed to investigate the way cultural aspects are represented in the reading and dialog sections of global (*American English File*) and localized ELT textbooks (*The ILI English Series*) which are widely used in Iran in order to explore how culture in aesthetic and sociological senses is realized in the series. The findings demonstrated that more emphasis was put on the sociological sense, i.e. more than the aesthetic sense, in both book series. Most of the contents in the local series were culture-free. Also, while in the global series sociological and aesthetic senses of culture were represented as a considerably vibrant entity, in the localized series less representations of sociological and aesthetic senses were present.

### 3. The State of ELT in Iran

Teaching English language currently begins at the first year of junior high school in Iran and is continued to the end of high school in a period of around six to seven school years. It is taught three hours a week. The locally designed textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education are taught throughout the country. The books that were designed after the Islamic revolution in 1979 underwent several revisions and were used until recently. After the spread of the criticism on ineffectiveness of the

older books (English Book 1, 2, 3 and 4) on the grounds of failure in teaching communicative proficiency, new book series were developed by the English Department of the Textbook Publication Office in the Ministry of Education. These include the Prospect and Vision series. The Prospect series comprise of three books for junior high school (now called “first intermediate school”) that were published in 2014-2015 and have been used for three years. The Vision book series include three books for high school (“second intermediate school). The Vision 1 (V1) book was published in 2016 and has been taught since then. The Vision 2 (V2) book was published in 2017 and the Vision 3 (V3) book was published in August-September 2018.

#### **4. Statement of the Problem**

The cultural content of the previous ELT textbooks for Iranian public school has been investigated by many researchers. These researchers have investigated the books that were in use until 2014; when new book series of Prospect and Vision were published, respectively, for lower and upper secondary education. The new books, the Vision series particularly, have not undergone thorough cultural evaluation. In addition, much controversy still exists over the (degree of) inclusion or exclusion of target cultural content. There exist two extreme views in this regard. On the one hand ELT is seen as representing and introducing western culture to the Iranian students, and as a result damaging or endangering the national identity of the country. On the other hand, there are views that see ELT in Iran as no more than a representation of the Persian or Islamic ideology that lacks the target cultural content necessary for successful intercultural communication (Aliakbari, 2004).

Further, the studies that have been carried out previously are mostly studies of one book at most, some chapters of a book, or even selected exercises or subsections in every chapter of a book. In addition, aforementioned researchers (Aliakbari, 2004; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014; Tajeddin & Bahrebar, 2017) delineated various shortcomings in the older book series with regard to cultural content that were expected to be taken into account in developing the new book

series. Thus, a comprehensive study on the new Vision book series was deemed necessary, as to evaluating the type of cultural reference highlighted in these textbooks, and also the dimension(s) of culture which have been represented. This study was deemed significant in order to deal with the above-mentioned controversy and to see whether the inadequacies pinpointed by researchers in the older book series have been attended to; and also, whether the treatment of culture in the instructional materials sufficient to develop students' intercultural competence in English. Specifically, this study aimed at seeking answers to the following research questions.

### **Research Questions**

- 1- What range of cultural reference is represented in the Vision textbooks? In particular, what cultures (source/target/international/neutral) are represented in the cultural content of the Vision textbooks and to what extent?
- 2- What is the most prominent cultural dimension portrayed in Vision textbooks? aesthetic, sociological, semantic or pragmatic?

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1. Theoretical Framework**

This study was carried out in light of two frameworks proposed by Adaskou, et al. (1990) and the Cortazzi and Jin (1999). Adaskou, et al. divide culture into four dimensions, including aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic or pragmatic senses. The aesthetic sense includes what people produce in the form of media, cinema, music, literature, and the like. The sociological sense denotes the organization and nature of family, home life, interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs, and institution. The semantic sense refers to a conceptual system in the language, conditioning all our perceptions and thought processes, emotional states, time and space relations, and colors. The pragmatic sense implies the social skills, background knowledge, and paralinguistic skills that result in the success of communication with respect to (a) the ability for using appropriate models of the various communicative functions such as norms of politeness, awareness of conventions in interpersonal



relations, obligations, questions of status, license, and familiarity with the primary rhetorical conventions in different written genres.

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) divide cultural reference into three aspects of reference the source cultural content, i.e. the native culture of the learners, reference to the target cultural content that is the culture of the society who speaks the language they are learning, and reference to the international cultural content that is a mixture of different cultures. Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) added one more aspect to Cortazzi and Jin's framework that is reference to neutral cultural content. It denotes reference to cultural content (advising teenagers, for instance) which does not belong to any of the three divisions made by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). "For instance, 'family' can be seen as a cultural theme; however, a family-related dialogue in a textbook can be presented in such a way that it does not reflect the cultural values of the L1, the TL, or any other particular culture and hence is regarded culturally neutral" (p. 5).

## **5.2. Instrumentation**

A researcher-made checklist (see Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7) was used to collect the data. It was prepared based on the aforementioned frameworks and its reliability and content validity were evaluated by a panel of researchers. The checklist aimed at finding out what range of cultural references, and what dimensions of culture are incorporated in the textbooks. The checklist delineates the culture (source, target, international or neutral) that has been referred to more frequently and the dimensions (aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic) of culture which were more commonly portrayed in the textbooks.

## **5.3. The Corpus**

The corpus included all textual and visual sections of Vision 1, Vision 2 and Vision 3 (hereafter represented as V1, V2, and V3 respectively) textbook series that are currently in use in Iranian public high school system. The series includes ten units altogether. The V1 includes four, the V2 includes three and the V3 includes three Lessons or units respectively. The books possess the same unit structure. Each unit comprises the sections of Get Ready, Conversation, New Words &

Expressions, Reading, Grammar, Listening & Speaking, Pronunciation, Writing, and What You Learned.

#### **5.4. Procedure and Data Analysis**

After a comprehensive review of the related literature the abovementioned checklist was prepared to collect the data. After instruction and discussion on the counting process, two researchers (both Ph.D. candidates of ELT in Ilam University and also high school teachers) attempted independently to count the sources of cultural reference and dimensions of culture in all textual and visual sections of the books; and Kappa agreement was calculated to insure consistency in counts ( $r = .85$ ). Also, the counts were double-checked by each researcher to assure consistency. Then, the collected data were analyzed in the light of the related frameworks. Finally, the findings of the study were tabularized and discussed vis-a-vis the previous theories and related literature.

### **6. Results**

In order to find out the most represented culture in Vision textbooks data analysis was carried out using the framework adopted from Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014). The frequency counts of each cultural type of reference was obtained (Table 1). The results show that in all three textbooks the foremost attention has been paid to the source culture, i.e. Persian (frequency ( $f$ )=233). With a relatively large difference in frequency counts, the next sources of culture in terms of frequently were, respectively, international culture ( $f=54$ ), neutral culture ( $f=50$ ) and target culture ( $f=33$ ).

Likewise, in order to investigate the cultural dimensions that appear more frequently in ELT textbooks; i.e. addressing cultural senses or dimensions, frequency counts were obtained in order to answer this research question (Table 1). The findings reveal that all three books focused their foremost attention on esthetic dimension of culture ( $f=256$ ), followed respectively by semantic ( $f=67$ ), sociological ( $f=34$ ) and sociolinguistic ( $f=13$ ) senses.

The esthetic sense received the highest level of attention in reference to the source, the target and the international cultures. With regard to the source cultural content, respectively, the esthetic and semantic senses received the most attention, the sociological element received little attention, and no representation of the sociolinguistic (pragmatic) element was observed. Regarding the target cultural content, only the esthetic sense received a significant degree of attention ( $f=23$ ) and other senses were given little attention. In the case of the international culture, the highest frequency count was observed for the esthetic sense ( $f=52$ ), the sociological sense received very little attention ( $f=2$ ), and no count was observed for semantic and sociolinguistic senses. Concerning the neutral cultural reference, the sociological sense had the most frequency count ( $f=21$ ) followed by the esthetic sense ( $f=16$ ); and the semantic ( $f=9$ ) and sociolinguistic ( $f=4$ ) senses received less attention.

**Table 1. Frequencies of cultural elements and cultural references in the textbooks**

References	Cultural elements				Total
	Esthetic	Sociological	Semantic	Sociolinguistic	
Source Culture	165	8	60	-	<b>233</b>
Target Culture	23	3	3	4	<b>33</b>
International Cs	52	2	-	-	<b>54</b>
Neutral Culture	16	21	4	9	<b>50</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>369</b>

In order to compare the textbooks in terms of aesthetic and sociological cultural elements, the frequency of representations of these two headings, including their different subcomponents across each of the four types of reference to culture, was calculated. Tables 2 and 3 display the results.

The results showed that representations in the aesthetic sense ( $f=256$ ) emerged far more frequently than in the sociological sense, i.e. the majority of cultural items were aesthetic. As Table 2 shows, for the source culture, from among the various subcomponent of esthetic sense

literature (f=94) and tourism (f=59) were, respectively, the most highly focused themes. With regard to the target culture, the most frequent esthetic theme was the literature (f=15), followed by history (f=6). However, this was limited to using proper personal names. Also, no reference was made to tourist attractions and sites related to the target culture. Concerning the international culture, the most frequent themes were respectively tourism (f=33) and literature (f=10). Regarding the neutral cultural reference, references were limited only to geography, that is to environment and wildlife (f=16). It is notable, however, that no reference was made to media, cinema and music in all of the sources of culture except for two cases of referring to IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) and Amir Kabir TV series.

**Table 2. Frequency of esthetic sense representation in the textbooks**

Frequency	Esthetic dimensions							Total
	Media	Cinema	Music	Literature	Tourism	Geography	History	
<b>Source culture</b>	2	-	-	94	59	6	5	<b>165</b>
<b>Target culture</b>	-	-	-	15	-	2	6	<b>23</b>
<b>International culture</b>				10	33	7	2	<b>52</b>
<b>Neutral culture</b>						16		<b>16</b>

Table 3 displays that, for the source culture, three themes were observed in the sociological sense, namely work and leisure (F=2), customs and institutions (F=3), and social values (F=3). In the target culture, reference was made to dollar (F=1), and customs and institutions (F=2). For the international culture, only two cases of

reference were made to customs and institutions. In the neutral source, references were made respectively to social values (F=10), interpersonal relations (F=5), and customs and institutions (F=2).

**Table 3. Frequency of sociological sense representation in the textbooks**

Frequency	Sociological dimensions							Total
	Material Condition	Organization & Nature of	Home Life	Interpersonal Relations	Work & Leisure	Institution	Customs & Social	
<b>Source culture</b>	-	-	-	-	2	3	3	<b>8</b>
<b>Target culture</b>	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	<b>3</b>
<b>International culture</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	<b>2</b>
<b>Neutral culture</b>	-	-	4	5	-	2	10	<b>21</b>

Table 4 to 7 display the observed themes and examples of reference to each source and each dimension or sense of culture in the book series. As Table 4 shows the book series contain representations of the source culture and specifically about the esthetic, sociological and semantic cultural elements. However, no representation of sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense was observed. The esthetic sense encompasses such themes as tourism, wildlife, literature, history and art. The sociological sense includes themes such as valuing hardworking, charity and bravery; and also, Iranian subcultures such as Iranian food. The semantic sense consists of Islamic religious themes such as Allah, Islam, Muslims, Quran and hijab; and also themes such as love of Iran, the language and national identity.

**Table 4. Cultural elements associated with the source culture in the textbooks**

References	Cultural elements			
	Esthetic	Sociological	Semantic	Socio-linguistic
Source Culture	<p><b>Using Persian/Islamic proper names:</b> Mr. Ahmadi, Mr. Iranmehr, Meysam, Mahdi, Mina, Shadi, Maryam,</p> <p><b>Iranian wildlife:</b> -Cheetah, bear, zebra, Persian lion died out, Persian zebra in Tooran, -Iranian families pay attention to nature and wildlife, -The animal diversity of Lorestan,</p> <p><b>Visiting Iran:</b> -Iranian place names (Shiraz, Isfahan, Persian Gulf, Persepolis, ancient wind towers, an old observatory, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Imam Reza Holy Shrine, -<i>Travel to Iran, Iran: A True Paradise</i>, -Visit the bazaar,</p> <p><b>Iranian geography:</b> -Map of Iran among neighbor countries, Iran is a vast country in Southwest Asia,</p> <p><b>Iranian nationality:</b> -Flag of Iran, Iranian nationality, Iranian passport, -Photo of Iranian national soccer team,</p> <p><b>History of Iran:</b></p>	<p><b>Social values:</b> -A hard-working postman, -Brave soldiers defended our country, -Value of donating blood, -Photo of a Charity celebration (jashn-e nikookari)</p> <p><b>Iranian food:</b> -Photo of an Iranian food (rice/Zereshkpolo), -Rice is the most popular food in Iran,</p>	<p><b>Islamic perceptions:</b> -Imam Khomeini's photo and statement, -Quranic verses, Reading and reciting the Holy Quran, Holy Quran in more than 100 languages, -A statement by the Holy Prophet, -Thank and Belief in Allah -Females with hijab, -Pilgrimage -Muslims, we live in an Islamic society</p> <p><b>Perceptions about Iran:</b> -Love of our country Iran, -My favorite language is absolutely my mother tongue! (Persian), -Our heritage and culture bring us a sense of Identity, -I.R. stand for Islamic Republic,</p> <p><b>Iranian calendar:</b> -Persian calendar, -Finish our English book before <i>Khordad, Shahrivar</i>,</p>	

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-The first wind machine was used in ancient Persia, Ancient wind towers, An old bazaar, Norooz, Monuments (Persepolis), The war (Iran-Iraq),

**Iranian historical figures and scientists:**

-Avicenna, Razi, Nasireddin Toosi, Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid Kashani,

-Photo of *recently martyred* Iranian scientists,

-Names of Iranian *heroes* or benevolent people (Rizali Khajavi, Dr. Mohammad Gharib),

-Iranian literary figures (Ferdowsi's sculpture, Hafez's tomb),

**Ref to Persian language:**

-Names of the planets in Persian, Persian proverbs, read Hafez's Ghazals and Divan, Nezami's poems, Persian dictionary (farhang-e Moeen, Loghat-e Fors (by Asadi Tusi),

**Persian art:**

-Iranian artworks and handicrafts (painting, calligraphy, pottery, carpet, tilework): Meibod tile, Farshchian's painting, Isfahan's Termeh, Qashqai Gabbeh),

-Iranian craftsman and woman with local clothes,

-Weaving a rug, a silk carpet,

**Iranian Media:**

Referring to IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting), Amir Kabir TV series,

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According to Table 5, concerning the target culture, the esthetic sense encompasses such themes as using proper English names such as Alice, Frank and Mr. Sanders, referring to literary and scientific figures such as Edison and Newton, and referring to target culture nationalities such as Canadian and Australian. In the sociological sense of culture only reference was made to dollar as a currency. In the case of semantic sense, only references were made to calendar such as using names of the months, the seasons, and also the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, concerning the sociolinguistic sense only references were made to a few intonation and stress patterns in English.

**Table 5. Cultural elements associated with the target culture in the textbooks**

Referen ces	Cultural elements			
	Esthetic	Sociologic al	Semantic	Sociolinguistic
<b>Target Culture</b>	<b>Using English proper names:</b> -Alice, Frank, James, Nancy, Margaret, Susan, Kate, Sofia, Mr. Sanders,			-Falling intonation in WH Qs and affirmative statements,
	<b>Figures and scientists:</b> -Edison invented the light bulb, -Newton's (apple tree/gravity) story, -Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, -Alexander Fleming worked on bacteria and discovered penicillin,	<b>Material condition:</b> Dollars,	<b>Calendar:</b> September, the seasons, 21 <sup>st</sup> century,	-Rising intonation in yes/no questions, stress in numbers (sixteen/sixty), -Both rising and falling intonations in conditional sentences,
	<b>Nationality:</b> Canadian, Australian,			



Table 6 shows that, in the case of international culture there were such esthetic themes as referring to activities around the world like bullfighting and the Olympics, referring to countries and continents such as Asia, Europe and Brazil, referring to travel destinations and tourist attractions such as the Eifel Tower, The Pyramids and Taj Mahal. In the sociological sense reference was made to greetings such as hugging by men. However, no representations were observed for the semantic and sociolinguistic senses of culture.

**Table 6. Cultural elements associated with the international cultures in the textbooks**

Cultural elements				
References	Esthetic	Sociological	Semantic	Sociolinguistic
<b>Intern ationa l Cs</b>	<b>Activities:</b> -Bullfighting in Spain, Taking part in the Olympics,			
	<b>Referring to the world:</b> -We live on Earth (a globe) -Referring to continents and countries: Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, Brazil, China, -Airport timetable (Kuala Lumpur, Auckland, Hong Kong),		<b>Customs:</b> Hugging by two men,	
	<b>Travel around the world:</b> -Travel to Africa, The Nile, Travel to Japan, photos of Asian tourist attractions, Photo of world tourist attractions (Eifel Tower, The Pyramids, Leaning Tower of			

Pisa, Iguazu Falls, China's Great Wall, India's Taj Mahal,

**Wildlife:** African lions,

**Languages:** speak or learn Russian, French, English, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, a Spanish class,

**Nationality:** German, Chinese, Spanish, Italian,

**Figures:**

Mary Curry found uranium, Albert Einstein,

**Institutions:**

Nobel Prize,

**Names and places around the world:**

-Diego is a Spanish tourist, Carlos is a tour guide in Madrid, - Alfredo is an Italian tourist;

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Concerning the neutral culture, in the esthetic sense references were made to protecting or hurting the environment and the wildlife. The sociological sense included such themes as social values (e.g. hard working, kindness and art), social advice (save energy), leisure (reading a book) and a healthy lifestyle (eat vegetables, avoid junk food and fatty food). In the semantic sense, two themes were observed, one was having enough food in the future and so *a happy life*, and the other clean air and water in the future and so *a safe place to live*. Finally, regarding the sociolinguistic sense, the observed themes included travel advice and different signs such as traffic signs and other signs such as “no smoking” or “no swimming”.

**Table 7. Cultural elements associated with the neutral culture in the textbooks**

Cultural elements				
References	Esthetic	Sociological	Semantic	Sociolinguistic
Neutral Culture	<p><b>Protecting the environment:</b> -Protecting endangered animals, -helping/saving injured animals, hurting animals,</p> <p><b>-Hurting the environment:</b> -Cutting trees, -Destroying jungle, -Taking care of nature,</p> <p><b>Wildlife:</b> -Tiger is a wild animal,</p>	<p><b>Social values:</b> -Valuing working hard, helping people, studying, kindness, art, - Children should listen to advice of older people and respect their parents, -We have to take care of elderly people, -Family members should listen to each other, -The importance of apologizing, -We can help people by donating,</p> <p><b>Social advice:</b> -Save energy,</p> <p><b>Leisure:</b> -Reading a book,</p> <p><b>Healthy lifestyle:</b> -Eating vegetables for a healthy diet, - Smoking is harmful</p>	<p>-Having enough food in the future (and so <b>a happy life,</b> -Clean air and water in the future and so <b>a safe place to live,</b></p>	<p><b>Travel advise:</b> -Be polite to people and their values, -Do not say bad things about their food, dresses, or ceremonies, -Talk to other people and try to understand them, -Respect other peoples' cultures), -Protect nature and the historical sites, -Do not hurt animals or plants, -Do not write anything on buildings,</p> <p><b>Signs:</b> -Traffic signs, -Prohibition signs: no swimming, no</p>

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and bad for everyone, -Young people now prefer fast food, -Avoid junk food, fatty foods, -Bad habits and addiction can be harmful to health, -Kids love chocolate,	fishing, no smoking, no parking,
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## 7. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the cultural content of Vision textbook series that are currently in use in Iranian public secondary school system. For this aim, frequency counts were used to collect the data. Next, the data were analyzed according to the respective theoretical frameworks. Results of the frequency counts indicated that the Vision ELT textbooks contained the most cultural content in favor of their L1 culture that is Persian. Indeed, the use of source cultural elements was a dominant feature, followed respectively by reference to international, neutral and target cultures. This is comparable to the finding of Rashidi and Meihami (2016) who reported that the locally published EFL textbooks (Prospect textbook series) in the expanding circle countries contain the most cultural content in association with their L1 culture. However, this part of the result is unlike the findings of Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) who found that in Iran Language Institute (ILI) textbooks (locally published Iranian EFL textbooks) most of the cultural elements were culturally neutral.

Likewise, the findings showed that the Vision book series focused on the esthetic sense of culture at the first place, followed respectively by semantic, sociological and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) senses. This is dissimilar to the findings of Rashidi and Meihami (2016) and Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) who reported that other locally

published Iranian EFL textbooks focused primarily on the sociological sense of culture, i.e. more than on the esthetic sense.

With reference to the source cultural content, the esthetic sense received the most attention. In fact, the majority of cultural items were aesthetic. From among the various subcomponent of esthetic sense of culture, literature, tourism and art were, respectively, the most focused themes. However, no representation was observed about music and cinema; and reference to the media was limited to simply mentioning two names. The semantic sense received the second degree of attention. It was limited to Islamic religious themes and national identity themes. It would be more appropriate to make reference also to more detailed social concepts such as gifts and souvenirs. Little attention was paid to sociological element. Particularly, representations of custom and institutions were absent in this regard. The sociolinguistic (pragmatic) did not have frequency counts, while such topics as referring to some taboos or appropriate dressing and behavior were required and expected.

Concerning the target culture, the esthetic sense was slightly focused upon and other senses received very little or no attention. Particularly, the most frequent esthetic theme was literature followed by history. However, this was restricted to using proper personal names. Similarly, no reference was made to tourist attractions and sites associated with the target culture. The esthetic sense included reference to target culture nationalities such as Canadian and Australian but no reference was made to the United Kingdom, the United States or to the respected nationalities. In the sociological sense, the only element to which was referred to was the currency Dollar. This contrasts the finding by Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) who found the ELT textbooks highlighted the sociological sense with regard to L2 cultural content. Because, according to Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (ibid) sociological sense covers more tangible daily sociocultural values and norms, it would be more appropriate to refer to, for instance, greetings, people's lives and relationships, work, leisure, etc. For the semantic sense, only reference was made to western calendar and other semantic concepts

were lacking. Further, concerning the sociolinguistic sense, it was expected to refer to interpersonal relationships such as appropriateness and etiquette topics (e.g. dress code, how to address others) in the target culture that are necessary to intercultural understanding.

In relation to the international culture, the esthetic sense was slightly focused upon and other senses received little or no attention. In this regard, tourism and literature were respectively the most frequent themes. References were limited to tourist attractions and some names, e.g. a few popular activities and names of some countries and continents. In the sociological sense references were narrowed only to a way of greeting. Yet, the semantic and sociolinguistic senses of culture were totally absent.

About reference to neutral culture, the sociological sense was focused upon the most, followed by the esthetic sense. Indeed, the sociological sense was paid a significant degree of attention and consisted of such themes as social values, leisure (although cursory), and healthy lifestyle. In the esthetic sense, references were limited only to geography and environment, e.g. place names and protecting or hurting the environment and the wildlife. In the semantic sense, only two themes were observed which related to the quality of life. Eventually, regarding the sociolinguistic sense the observed themes were narrowed to travel advise and traffic signs.

It is noteworthy, though, that no reference was made to media, cinema and music as the most prominent aspects or representations of culture in all the four sources of culture, except for two cases of referring to IRIB (the main broadcasting organization in Iran) and mentioning the name of a TV series in the source culture. Even a brief mention of names of celebrities (filmmakers, musicians and artists) or works such as famous movies, albums, etc. are totally avoided in all sources of culture. There existed little L2 pragmatic or cultural awareness topics. The target cultural content, i.e. the culture that is in association with the English-speaking world, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom were totally avoided; even no reference was made to the names or nationalities of the two countries. Also, no

fair attention was paid to international culture and the present topics were limited to merely mentioning some geographical names and tourist sites.

It is believed that the international ELT textbooks that are published by English-speaking countries are ideologically loaded (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015; Wang, 2016) and preach western standards and values. In other words, they “describe discourse as it might be in a better world rather than discourse as it is” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 10). In other words, they have a hidden agenda, i.e. they try to advertise western culture and impose their cultural norms and values to the learners along with ELT materials (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014; Taki, 2008).

Many arguments have supported the inclusion of the source cultural content in ELT textbooks. Adascou et al., 1990, for example, believe that if the language is presented in contexts familiar to the students, they have more motivation to learn the language; and local language teachers might find it uncomfortable to present alien cultures to the students that they themselves know little about.

## 8. Conclusion

The results of the current study suggest that the cultural content of the locally-published ELT textbooks is uneven, i.e. more source, international, and neutral cultural content are represented than the target cultural content. The results of this study corroborate the hypothesis that ELT material developers try to incorporate the L1 cultural content more in order to expose learners more to the local culture and avoid the so-called “alien” culture that may be harmful to the students and alienate them from local values. In other words, the local ELT textbooks, likewise, have a hidden agenda. This can be explained by the argument that the “*one-size-fits-all*” approach that is present in the international ELT textbook is no longer binding (Canagarajah, 2002). Another explanation might be that “they believe in ‘denationalized’ ownership for English as an international language” (Rashidi & Meihami, 2016, p.12) and thus believe that the internalization of native speakers’ cultural content is not required. However, L2 learners acquire other

cultures via their own culture which denotes what Kramsch (1993) called “sphere of interculturality”. However, the results showed that that ELT textbooks overemphasized the source cultural representations which may harm the L2 intercultural competence that students need to acquire.

Further, according to Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017), publication of local ELT textbooks which is directed by policymakers and material developers aims at the cultural neutralization so as the exposed content is not associated to any particular culture and thus prevents the students from admitting the alien contents as “inevitable norms” (p. 138).

Hence, publication of local ELT textbooks in the Iranian context is, from one perspective, mostly aimed to incorporate elements of the L1 culture so as to maintain and protect Iranian cultural heritage and national identity. From another perspective, however, it aimed for cultural neutralization, i.e. to avoid the target cultural content as much as possible in order to avoid the damage to the local culture and national identity through preventing the possible process of “becoming” (Wang, 2016) which means being affected by the attractions of the western culture and adopt their norms and values as better culture. Conversely, excessive attention of the source cultural content may ruin the authenticity of the materials and harm the content that is, in principle, aimed to provide the learners with intercultural understanding and make them culturally competent. Overall, uneven representation of the cultural senses may make ELT textbooks culturally inadequate.

The findings of this study suggest that the Vision textbook series may not help to enhance cultural competence among learners. The argument is that since very few cultural elements have been referred to, with regards to the target culture at least, language learners might feel too much detached from the target culture which in turn might hinder the learning process (Abdullah & Kumari, 2009). Further, such insufficient and uneven content, which will definitely be the result of excessive exposure to the source cultural contents and specifically neutral cultural elements, might alienate, marginalize (Tajeddin &



Bahrebar, 2017) and culturally isolate the language learners from the international world.

Accordingly, the implications of this study address ELT stakeholders in general, in order to attend to research findings in this regard and endeavor cooperatively to provide learners with a balanced and even cultural content. Policymakers, materials designers and educators might need to review and perhaps reconsider the representations of cultures in ELT materials. That is, all senses of culture need to be evenly incorporated in the ELT curriculum and sufficient exposure to all senses of the target culture, and also to the more tangible elements of culture, be provided for EFL learners in order to help them gain intercultural understanding and competence.

At the end, if the concerns are over maintaining and protecting the local cultural norms and values, and if the worry is that exposure to target cultural content may bring about a tendency for cultural comparison and in turn result in discontent among learners with their own culture (Adascou et al., 1990), it is suggested that the roots of the problem be identified in a different area and the issue be address from a different perspective. Instead of limiting the exposure of the students to foreign cultures, the local stakeholders should perform cultural studies, embark on cultural awareness-raising efforts and make the local cultural values more appealing to the younger generation, and address the “why” question in this regard, that is “why do the students in the local cultures might find a foreign culture more appealing, be attracted to it, and be discontent with their own culture?”

From another perspective, as Kumaravadivelu (2011) stated, in this globalized world, we are not supposed to isolate the local cultures. Instead, the local people should plant the culture on their own cultural roots and cultural heritage, and at the same time keep the window open for new cultural themes. What is meant is that individual cultural growth should at the same time be informed by the idea of rootedness and openness. In other words, we must believe in our own cultural heritage, but at the same time keep our mind open. In order to do that, in addition to learning about other cultures which results in cultural

literacy, we should try to also learn from other cultures that results in cultural liberty. In other words, we must plant our feet in our cultural heritage, but at the same time, keep the windows wide open for fresh ideas, values and cultures.



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